RUSKIN and the ECONOMISTS

by

John Tyree Fain

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JOHN TYREE FAIN

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To

LUCILE WELCH FAIN

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PREFACE

THIS VOLUME represents an intermittent interest of many years in Ruskin's political economy. Most of the basic material was first presented as a doctor's thesis to Vanderbilt University in 1941, after which I published four articles on the subject in *Modern Language Quarterly, PMLA,* and *Southern Economic Journal* from 1943 to 1952. The idea that Ruskin, a great amateur in the field of social science, might be studied profitably in relation to his professional contemporaries was suggested to me by Robert Morss Lovett while I was in the graduate school of the University of Chicago in 1936. It remained as an intellectual link when my career as student of English literature was interrupted now and again by depression and wartime work in industry, the National War Labor Board, and the Federal Reserve Bank. I should like to thank the editors of the journals mentioned for helpful suggestions and for permission to use material first published in their pages. I also wish to thank my colleagues at the University of Florida for their careful reading of the manuscript and for invaluable aid: Robert Hood Bowers of the English Department, John G. Eldridge of the Economics Department, and William C. Havard of the Political Science Department.

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INTRODUCTION

At no time since his death in 1900 has interest in the life and writings of John Ruskin been as great as at present. Much of it centers around the publication in 1948 of Sir William James's *Order of Release, the story of John Ruskin, Effie Gray and John Everett Millais told for the first time in their unpublished letters,* and of J. H. Whitehouse's answer, *Vindication of Ruskin* (1950), different versions of Ruskin's marriage experience. In 1949 was published what appears to be the most important item of Ruskinian scholarship since the completion in 1912 of the Cook and Wedderburn edition, Derrick Leon's posthumous *Ruskin, The Great Victorian,* which for some reason has scarcely been noticed in America. In the same year came Peter Quennell's *John Ruskin, the Portrait of a Prophet,* little more than a well-written popularization of new material made available by Admiral James and others. Another biography, Joan Evans' *John Ruskin* of 1954, is of particular interest because of its extensive use of Ruskin's diaries. It may be considered as an introduction to the diaries, which have been announced for publication with Dr. Evans and J. H. Whitehouse as editors.

Though these biographies, as well as the older ones, consider Ruskin's political economy, some of them at great length, they do not provide enough historical and critical perspective to enable the literary student to follow Ruskin's argument with any real awareness of the issues involved. The present study is an attempt to fill in the background necessary for such a perspective, or perhaps

to furnish a guide through one of the territories that merge more and more with literary investigation as we study the great Victorians, those men of a second renaissance who took all knowledge for their province.

Students of Ruskin may be surprised to find that the discussions of the following pages avoid the consideration of Ruskin as a psychopath. R. H. Wilenski in his *John Ruskin, An Introduction to the Further Study of His Life and Work* (1933), discovered something very important —the correlation of Ruskin's day-to-day literary production with the state of his mental health—so that nobody doubts any more that Ruskin's ideas were influenced to an abnormal degree by psychological factors. However, Wilenski's interpretation seems to have been too greatly affected by the popular combination of behaviorism and Freudianism current when he made it. Of course, Wilenski, an art historian, states that he has checked his material with psychiatrists, but it must be said that he is much more confident in his diagnosis of a writer thirty-three years dead than intelligent doctors were at that time in the diagnoses of patients sitting right beside them.

For whatever reasons, then, so much recent scholarship has dealt with the vagaries of Ruskin's love life, his too great fondness for children and his manic-depressive cycles that it seems more than justifiable to re-emphasize one segment of his serious contribution to the history of thought. Though the effort has been made here not to hamper the general reader with too much of the paraphernalia of research, enough has been included to enable the student of Ruskin to judge matters for himself, to re-enact on his own some of the drama of Ruskin's intellectual life, and to follow up suggestions for further in-

vestigation. Also the argument has been kept as professional as capability would allow from a conviction that a right appreciation of Ruskin's economic work can be arrived at only by viewing it in relation to treatises closely allied to the scientific tradition. Thus almost no mention is made of literary influences. Ruskin's position among the literary critics of orthodox political economy and of nineteenth-century industrial practice is well known. H. V. Routh says that Ruskin—like Carlyle, Froude, Disraeli, Gaskell, Reade, Kingsley, and Dickens—was outraged at the mammonism of the time, but that only Ruskin earned the "implacable hostility" of educated conservatives. As he says, "Carlyle and Froude might denounce—many would say *traduce*—the economic thinkers. Ruskin dares to meet them on their own ground and to demonstrate the errors of their ways." [1]

But to avoid the literary influences and similarities is not to minimize their importance. Since Ruskin provides, by the nature of his attack, a logical link between the literary men and the economists, it is necessary first to know Ruskin's qualifications for meeting the economic thinkers on their own ground and what success he had in demonstrating the errors of their ways. With such information it should then be less difficult to assign other literary men their proper places in the tradition of social protest literature.

The plan followed will be to give in the first chapter Ruskin's qualifications as a political economist. The second is a discussion of Ruskin's indictment of orthodox political economy. The third is a presentation of certain premises of orthodox political economy, so that a means may be provided for testing the soundness of Ruskin's

criticism. The fourth is a consideration of Ruskin's constructive economy, his contribution to a theory of social economics. The fifth is a study of *Unto This Last* with particular attention to Ruskin's controversial method, his general argument, and his ideas as they appear in other social science treatises.

Several terms used in this study may be confusing to the reader if their meanings are not here indicated.

"Political economy." As the study develops, it will be evident that Ruskin attaches one meaning to this term, his opponents another. Here it is necessary only to point out that before the formulation of modern economics, political science, and sociology as separate branches of inquiry, "political economy" was in formal treatises and in popular parlance a vague term encompassing not only the content of the later sciences but also their application in the conduct of business and government. Therefore, in treating Ruskin as a political economist it is inadvisable to exclude on scientific grounds subject matter which Ruskin includes in his political economy. Even if such exclusions were based on present-day opinions on the scope of economic science, one should still have to choose from among a dozen species of economists, each with different ideas on scope.

"Political economist" and "economist." These terms are used interchangeably in the following pages. The former has almost disappeared in modern usage, but even in the nineteenth century no consistent distinction was made between the two. Either term is applied to Ruskin, though the more specific modern name for him would be "welfare economist."

"Orthodox political economy." The adjective "ortho-

dox" is used—sometimes ironically, as when it was first applied by Sismondi to his opponents—in economic treatises as a synonym for "liberal," "classical," "individualist," or "English." Here the word carries no ironical implication. Charles Gide centers the fundamental doctrine of the school around natural law and individualism. They believe, he says, that "The task of the economist is limited to discovering the play of these natural laws," which are "in no way opposed to man's liberty or to individual effort, the first and sole motive in social evolution." [2] Gide includes in the school Smith, Ricardo, J. S. Mill, McCulloch, Senior, and Cairnes in England; the early physiocrats, Say, Dunoyer, and Bastiat in France; Carey and Walker in America. Most historians would exclude the physiocrats. Modern writers often include as orthodox all present-day economists who retain Alfred Marshall's type of equilibrium analysis. Such modern economists are thought of in the present study, however, as "successors" of the orthodox school. The purposes of the discussion will be best served by selecting for emphasis Senior, Mill, Cairnes, and Bagehot. According to John Neville Keynes, father of John Maynard Keynes and author of the classic work *Scope and Method in Political Economy* (1891), these four most accurately represent orthodox economists from the standpoint of theory.

Chapter I

RUSKIN'S QUALIFICATIONS AS A POLITICAL ECONOMIST

Since this study will attempt to evaluate Ruskin's competence as a critic of the political economy of his day and as himself a constructive theorist, it seems proper first to indicate his limitations as a scientific investigator. Chief among these limitations is his apparent lack of curiosity concerning other theorists. When in 1860 Frederic Harrison read *Unto This Last* as it came out in the *Cornhill Magazine,* he was filled "with a sense of a new gospel on this earth, and a keen desire to be in personal touch with the daring spirit who had defied the Rabbis of the current economics." Harrison wanted Ruskin to study the *Positive Philosophy,* since he found the basis of the economics of Comte and Ruskin similar. John James Ruskin had also asked Harrison to suggest to his son some standard authorities. "He was always ready to talk—to ask questions—even to listen," Harrison chuckled fifty years later. "But as to allowing any man's thoughts, any book old or new, unless it were the Bible, or some poem, to assist, qualify, or enter into his own thoughts, it was not to be endured." [1]

Concerning the value of reading and study in the field of political economy Ruskin had already expressed himself in *The Political Economy of Art* in 1857. After saying that some apology may be due to the reader because profound study of the subject does not seem compatible with his usual work, he says that profound study is un-

necessary in political economy but that "accurate study, up to a certain point, is necessary for us all." Then he makes a statement that his critics did not let him soon forget. The economic principles used in his text are unsupported by references because he had "never read any author on political economy, except Adam Smith, twenty years ago." Whenever he had looked into any modern books on the subject, he had usually found them "encumbered with inquiries into accidental or minor commercial results," by which the authors were "not unfrequently prevented from seeing to the root of the business." [2] While stating, in *The Two Paths* of 1859, that luxurious spending is bad human economy, he says in answer to those who had laughed him out of court for the words just quoted: "I do not say this impetuously or suddenly, for I have investigated this subject as deeply, and as long, as my own special subject of art . . . . Foolish readers doubted their certainty because I told them I had 'never read any books on Political Economy.' Did they suppose I got my knowledge of art by reading books?" (XVI, 406).

Of course, Ruskin should not be taken entirely seriously in his statement that he never read any author on political economy. Perhaps it can be shown that he read few books on the subject and those few with less sympathy than is required for complete understanding. That he was engaged in studying it two years before the above statement was made seems apparent, however, from a letter written to Mrs. Carlyle in 1855: "My studies of political economy have induced me to think also that nobody knows anything about that, and I am at present engaged in an investigation, on independent principles, of the Natures

of Money, Rent, and Taxes, in an abstract form, which sometimes keeps me awake all night" (V, L). Naturally Ruskin's assertion that he did not read political economy was noted by reviewers in evidence of the fact that he was unqualified to write on the subject at all. Actually it is only a link in a typically ironic argument. Profess to know nothing, quiz and challenge those who profess to know, show that their books give no essential information, state that knowledge does not come from books but from life. It is the characteristic Ruskinian approach. Time and again, as will appear later when the details of Ruskin's argument against John Stuart Mill are considered, the reader seems to have conclusive evidence that Ruskin is either stupid or deceitful. Then the evidence begins to give way and the dilemma to lose its meaning in the light of the realization that Ruskin is only feigning ignorance in order to expose his opponent's confused thinking. It is a favorite device of his most revered masters, but Ruskin employs Plato's concealed dagger rather than Carlyle's bludgeon. However, when Ruskin suggests, as in the passage quoted above, that the best knowledge cannot be got from books, he is voicing one of his settled convictions: ". . . a few books will probably hold all the furniture good for [a man's] brain" (XVII, 168). Again he says, "For we none of us need many books . . . " (XVIII, 33). And he tells the beginner in *Elements of Drawing*, ". . . think long over a few things, and watch them earnestly. It is one of the worst errors of this age to try to know and see too much . . . . Beware of *handbook* knowledge" (XV, 76). Though Ruskin intends such statements as chiefly instructional, he was not a wide reader among modern books when compared, for instance, with the

other two greatest Victorian essayists, Carlyle and Arnold.

It is appropriate here, however, to set down somewhat more formally, first, the chief evidence in the works themselves of Ruskin's early concern with political economy and, second, Ruskin's own and some critics' statements on his qualifications as a political economist.

In *Praeterita* for the year 1847 he recalls the hours spent in his first serious study of the subject as among the best of his life. Referring again to the same year, he says, ". . . the foundation of all my political economy was dug down to, through the thistle-field of Crossmount" (XXXV, 426, 429). In 1849 he expresses two of the chief tenets of his constructive economics. The first is that there is a definite connection between the quality of the production and the attitude of the producer. The proper question to ask in dealing with ornament is this, "Was it done with enjoyment—was the carver happy while he was about it? . . . You cannot get the feeling by paying for it—money will not buy life" (VIII, 218). The second is the economy of proper spending, a more fundamental aspect of the same subject. What kind of life do our desires impose upon the workman? "It is not enough to find men absolute subsistence," he says; "we should think of the manner of life which our demands necessitate . . . ." He is closing *The Seven Lamps of Architecture,* and he adds—as if afraid to let himself go, or as a promise of things to come—"I could pursue this subject willingly, but I have some strange notions about it which it is perhaps wiser not loosely to set down" (pp. 264-265).

Ruskin emphasizes both of these points in "The Nature of the Gothic," the famous chapter of *The Stones of Venice* (1853). Here it may be noticed that he has reached

the heart of his political economy. The right economy is human economy. Tools of industry shape two products, the man who works and the article he makes; and of the two man is by far the more important. The "great and civilized invention of the division of labour" has been much studied, but it is falsely named: "It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men:—Divided into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail. . . . And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this,—that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages." And the evil cannot be met, he says, except by a "determined sacrifice" by all people of "such convenience, or beauty, or cheapness as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman"; and by a "demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour" (X, 196).[3]

The Stones of Venice, indeed, is definitely sociological in motivation; its beginning shows that Ruskin intends the reader to follow him in his oblique approach to the conditions of modern England. Of two of the three great powers that have controlled the oceans—Tyre and Venice and England—only memories and ruins remain. If England forgets the example of her predecessors, she "may be

led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction" (IX, 17).

At about the same time (1852) Ruskin was writing his letters on taxation, suffrage, and education (XII, 593; XI, 258). The circumstances of their suppression will be discussed later. They are the first writings in which he takes up questions of social policy directly and specifically. In them he advocates free trade; direct taxation and a graduated income tax; universal suffrage in which the number of votes cast varies with age, property, and education; universal education furnished by the state and suited to occupational needs. Although no manuscript of the third letter has been found, Cook and Wedderburn state that portions of it were used as Appendix 7, Volume III, *The Stones of Venice* (X, xli). The final paragraph of this appendix shows how far Ruskin in 1852 had progressed towards the doctrine which forms an important part of both *Unto This Last* and *Time and Tide;* it is indisputable "that the first duty of a state is to see that every child born therein shall be well housed, clothed, fed, and educated, till it attain years of discretion." Then he adds significantly, "But in order to the effecting this, the government must have an authority over the people of which we now do not so much as dream . . ." (XI, 263).

Thus it seems that before Ruskin began dipping into the writings of orthodox economists for the purpose of collecting polemical material, he had laid the foundations of his constructive economy. Admitting for the present that by refusing to study sympathetically the orthodox political economists, he was in 1860 and remained all his life a deficient critic of the economists, we should notice opinions on his qualifications as a constructive theorist.

When, as Ruskin says, his *Cornhill* essays met with "violent reprobation," it set him "gravely thinking," for he was sure they contained more important truths than all his other works. So he "resolved to make it the central work" of his life "to write an exhaustive treatise on Political Economy" (XVII, 143). What qualifications did Ruskin believe he possessed that fitted him to carry out that resolve?

In the first place, he believed that a knowledge of the processes of art production is essential to the proper treatment of economic wealth. It is extremely difficult to isolate one problem at a time in any discussion of Ruskin's views, so intricately woven in everything he writes are his legitimate criticism, his moral convictions, and his prejudices. Thus he refuses to admit the significance, or even the existence, of the careful distinction which orthodox economists make between intrinsic value and exchange value. This problem is necessarily reserved for a later and more general treatment. Suffice it to say here that Ruskin considered himself the first economic writer equipped with the necessary knowledge of works of art. *Munera Pulveris* (1872) is, he says in the preface, "the first accurate analysis of the laws of Political Economy which has been published in England." The reason he gives is that "no exhaustive examination" is possible to those "unacquainted with the value of the products of the highest industries, commonly called the 'Fine Arts'" (p. 131). And there is justice in the assumption—or should we say "presumption"? Art has little to do with commercial economy, but much to do with sound national economy. When the products of labor are considered as art products, such a point of view carries with it an indictment of the industry of

any age, but especially of that of nineteenth-century England. Once grant that the artistic attitude has a large place in the psychology of the craftsman, and that admission itself doubles the scope of the economic inquiry by redefining "production" so as to include the creation, or production, of a desirable workman, and by redefining "consumption" so that it means proper consumption. This extension, it may be objected, causes a loss of precision and makes of political economy a kind of sociology. Ruskin sustains this objection, insists in fact that political economy should be less precise and more sociological.

Ruskin believes, then, that a knowledge of art is an essential qualification for the political economist, and indeed his writings on art form the basis of his political economy. In *Modern Painters* he makes the statement concerning architecture that ". . . the preference accorded finally to one school over another, is founded on a comparison of their influences on the life of the workman . . ." (VII, 257). In *The Stones of Venice,* when discussing the price England must pay for her perfect mouldings and polishing, he says, ". . . there might be more freedom in England, though her feudal lords' lightest words were worth men's lives, and though the blood of the vexed husbandman dropped in the furrows of her fields, than there is while the animation of her multitudes is sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke, and the strength of them is given daily to be wasted into the fineness of a web, or racked into the exactness of a line" (X, 193). This characteristic passage is worth a digression, for it explains many in which Ruskin glorifies slavery and feudal conditions. Many of his contradictions and fantastic beliefs turn out to be merely rhetorical. "You think my convic-

tions are absurd," he seems to say, "but I can show you that bodily slavery and real feudalism are blessed states compared with spiritual slavery and commercial feudalism." One should be careful, however, in using such a simple gloss as a general interpretative index, even on the question of slavery itself in Ruskin's works.

Sufficient evidence has been recorded to show that Ruskin, as he wrote his art criticism, was conscious of the importance of art in a sane national economy. The following typical passage from *Fors Clavigera* shows his later attitude toward his art criticism: *"The Stones of Venice* taught the laws of constructive Art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice, for its beauty, on the happy life of the workman" (XXIX, 137). And if we sum up Ruskin's social philosophy in the briefest form in which he gives it in his works, ". . . life without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality . . ." (XX, 93), we see that art remains in his system the *sine qua non.* It is not strange, then, that Ruskin considered a knowledge of art production necessary to the political economist.

Again, Ruskin believed that he was qualified to speak as a political economist because of his close contact, through his father, with the business world. To one of his closest life-long friends, Dr. John Brown, who had written Ruskin's father expressing wonder that the father had permitted the publication of the first *Cornhill* essay, Ruskin writes: ". . . you must remember that having passed all my life in pretty close connection with the mercantile world, and hearing these subjects often discussed by men of business at my father's table, I am likely to know pretty well what I am about . . . so you must just wait patiently to see the end of it" (XVII, xxxiv). Although it may be

admitted that Ruskin is justified in relying on such experience to form his "extremely low estimate of the commercial mind as such" (XXXV, 130), he could not thus have become familiar with industry in general and labor relations. Many industrial engineers of the present day are unrealistic in their advice on plant efficiency because they know nothing about human reactions in the mill. Perhaps Ruskin's chief fault in his writings on industrial relations is that he really knows little about the psychology of working men. He supposes that they are children and that the ideal virtues in them are docility and respect for authority. For instance, he says that "the first character of the good and wise man at his work" is, like that of a well-trained child, modesty, "To know that he knows little . . . and to be always asking questions." The second is to be faithful, as the child, "Perceiving that its father knows best . . . gives him its hand, and will walk blindfold with him." The third character is to be loving: "Give a little love to a child, and you get a great deal back." And the fourth is to be cheerful (XVIII, 428-430). Ruskin apparently overlooks the fact that business contacts are likely to be on the surface, a point noted by one of his contemporaries. "The workmen who seem to the master to be the best men, because they are regular at their work and respectful in their manner," says W. L. Sargant, "may really be avaricious, selfish, hard hearted, and servilely minded: while others who are restless and irregular, may be kind and well intentioned." [4]

Ruskin seems to think also that because workmen do not talk about justice and doing good work, they therefore have no unspoken idealism (pp. 419, 425). He probably would not have understood the muttering obstinacy

of the workman who will not do the thing he has been told to do, because he knows it will result in shoddy work. One must be reminded again and again, however, of the complex nature of Ruskin's text. Ruskin does seem to overemphasize humility and obedience in the workman, but the qualification always lurks beneath the surface. He states that a true workman will trust and obey his employer as an obedient child its father. But then he adds, "They must trust their captains;—they are bound for their lives to choose none but those whom they *can* trust" (XVIII, 429-430). His illustration from proper soldiership is similar; he always thinks of the industrial worker as a working soldier. The soldier is wrong in believing it his whole duty to obey his country's command, for "A state without virtue, without laws, without honour, he is bound *not* to defend . . ." (XVIII, 483-484). Here can be heard, as in many of Ruskin's ideas, the echo of the voice of his master Carlyle: worship your heroes, but beware of—even destroy if need be—the sham variety.

While considering Ruskin's convictions about his qualifications as a political economist, it seems appropriate to inquire why he waited until mid-life before asserting himself. Saintsbury will have it that the idea merely occurred to Ruskin, and he started writing books, thus exemplifying his "knack of succumbing to any tempting current theory." [5] Hobson attributes Ruskin's tardy development to the fact that his early interests excluded definite contact with the subject. How does it happen, asks Hobson, that one who had felt and thought "so deeply and so widely" in so many fields "should have no inkling of that work which in middle life he came to recognize as his supreme mission"? His answer is that "Though in-

cautious and sometimes extravagant in words, John Ruskin was a plodding and careful thinker; his thoughts had never been directed, by necessary contact with his early interests, to the social and economic structure of societies, and therefore he had never formed any definite convictions relating to them." [6] Many commentators have emphasized the influence of Carlyle in causing Ruskin's change of interest from art to social problems, since that change occurred in the late 1850's, during a period of close association with Carlyle.

These views, however, either overlook or underestimate the fact that Ruskin's social ideas *do* appear in general outline in some of his works published before the 1857-1860 period. Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed upon the age factor when considering the development of Ruskin's social ideas. Because he was writing articles at fifteen and publishing books at twenty-four, it is thought surprising that those articles and books do not deal specifically with the interest which engrossed his later life. It has been shown, however, that Ruskin was developing his economy in his early twenties, early enough, one would think, for a person to venture any conclusion on the social and economic structure of society. John Stuart Mill's precocity in that regard can be traced to his unusual training, but even Mill did not write his own *Principles of Political Economy* till after he had turned forty.

The comparison with Mill is pertinent. For while James Mill fed his son political and economic doctrine from an early age, John James Ruskin seems to have done everything in his power to keep his son from directing his studies toward political and economic subjects. It is

plausible to assume that Ruskin would have taken to political economy much sooner than he did, had his father not obstructed him.

Before the evidence is given in support of this assumption, it should be remembered that John James Ruskin acted not only as his son's literary advisor but also as his agent. And Ruskin always submitted to his father all writings subject to the latter's correction. Fragmentary as the evidence of such correction must be, since confined to letters written when Ruskin was away from England, we may infer its early prevalence from the following contrite communication from father to son in 1847: "I suppose we may have mutually defrauded each other's character of its right and merit . . . . I have, however, no fears for the future, for tho' I have no prospect of becoming greatly changed, a circumstance has made me reflect that I was exceedingly wrong and short-sighted in all interruptions occasioned to your pursuits. . . . You will find me from conviction done with asking you to do anything not thought proper by yourself to do" (XXXVI, xviii). And we can assume its continuance from the bitterness of some of Ruskin's later comments.

The first time the father's criticism can be seen in full action against Ruskin's political economy is in 1852, when Ruskin sent from Venice his papers on taxation, suffrage, and education. He followed them with the letter of March 14, 1852: "I don't know whether you have found my *Times* letters worth sending, or whether the *Times* will put them in, but I rather hope so—not in the hope of their doing any good at present, but because I want to be able to refer to them in future.". He says he wishes he had

sent to the *Times* his boyhood opinion of the design of the Houses of Parliament before building had started, and then continues, "In like manner I hope the *Times* will put these letters in, for twenty years hence, if I live, I should like to be able to refer to them and say 'I told you so, and now you are beginning to find it out.' And that would give some power—then, however little it may be possible to do at present" (XII, lxxx-lxxxi).

His March 23 letter repeats the plea, perhaps evincing by the monotony of the phrasing either a decrease of hope that his letters will be published or an increase of chagrin at their being held up: "These three letters I want to be able to refer to twenty years hence—people may call them as futile as they like now. . . . These three letters do not profess to say anything new, any more than an Eton grammar does. But they profess to give grammatical and common rules in a simple and clear form, and one likely to be useful, as far as they may be attended to, more than a library full of treatises on political economy" (p. lxxxi).

John James Ruskin was on a business trip at the time, but Mrs. Ruskin acknowledged the letters and expressed fear that they would offend her husband, especially that he would not like a remark at the beginning of the first belittling Disraeli. So Ruskin tells her in his March 26 letter: "In case you should not yet have sent my letters to *Times,* and should be intending to send them, I wish, as my father likes D'Israeli, that he should put his pen through the sentence about him" (p. lxxxii). That his father objected to something more fundamental than the phrasing of the letters, however, is obvious from Ruskin's letter of March 29: ". . . sorry to hear from my mother that you were annoying yourself because you did not agree with

me, and I am sorry that in the midst of your labour in travelling I have caused you the additional work of these long letters. Keep mine until I get home, and then we will talk about them, but do not vex yourself because you think I am turning republican" (*Idem*). His letter of the next day continues in the same vein: "I should be exceedingly sorry if any letters of mine were to do any harm to people whom you respected, and who were doing as well as they could, and I shall be excessively so if anything said in the letters you are just now receiving induces you to publish what may *at present* do harm, though I believe it would in the long run do good" (p. lxxxiii). Also his father had no intention of leaving any doubt about his attitude towards the letters. In a letter dated March 30, 1852, he says: "I shall see to letters for *Times* on my return, as you so wish it. My feelings of attacks on your books and on your newspaper writing differ from yours in this way. I think all attacks on your books are only as the waves beating on Eddystone Lighthouse, whereas your politics are Slum Buildings liable to be knocked down; and no man to whom authority is a useful engine should expose himself to frequent defeat by slender forces" (p. lxxxiv). These are strong words, and they seem to have subdued Ruskin's economic impulse for a number of years.

It may be significant, in the light of his father's policy of obstruction, that Ruskin's next venture in the field of political economy was by the lecture route. Is it that he was not ready to take a chance again on suppression? Possibly so. His two lectures, *The Political Economy of Art,* delivered at Manchester July 10 and 13, 1857, show that by that time he was ready to set down a large part

of his economic doctrine. On their reissue in 1880 as *A Joy for Ever* he says, ". . . what I have since written on the political influence of the Arts has been little more than the expansion of these first lectures . . ." (XVI, 12).

His next and greatest economic writings were the *Cornhill* essays of 1860. Ruskin seems to have submitted the first of these to his father: "Early in July, John sent me from abroad his first paper, kindly saying I might suppress it if the publishing it would annoy me" (XVII, xxvii). However, he had already arranged to have it published. In a letter addressed to the literary adviser of the *Cornhill Magazine* publishers on July 1, 1860, he says: "Dear Mr. Williams,—I send you some Political Economy, which, if you can venture to use in any way for the *Cornhill,* stigmatizing it by any notes of reprobation which you may think necessary, I shall be very glad. All I care about is to get it into print, somehow" (p. xxvi). And although the father professed to like the essays, he had "begged of John to spare his brain and write nothing for a year or two" (p. xxvii). Ruskin's letter of October, 1860, to Lady Trevelyan speaks of his father as "contemplating my *Cornhill* gambols with a terrified complacency which is quite touching" (XXXVI, 345).

In 1862 John James Ruskin again had a chance—and took it—to attempt the suppression of Ruskin's economic views. Ruskin's reply is significantly vehement: "I have your letter stating receipt of second part of paper.[7] I am quite content that you should do anything with it that you like in your present state of health, but as far as mine is concerned the one *only* thing you can do for me is to let me follow out my work in my own way and in peace. . . . I don't mind this a bit if it does you any good to stop the

paper—only, don't think of me in such matters—the one only thing I can have is liberty. . . . The depression I am now under cannot be touched by any society. It can only lessen as I accomplish what I intend, and recover in some degree the lost ground of life" (XXXVI, 415). A letter of the same year to Lady Trevelyan exhibits well the relation between father and son, at least the latter's reactions: ". . . we disagree about all the Universe, and it vexes him, and much more than vexes me. . . . his whole life is bound up in me, and yet he thinks me a fool—that is to say, he is mightily pleased if I write anything that has big words and no sense in it, and would give half his fortune to make me a member of Parliament if he thought I would talk, provided only the talk hurt nobody, and was all in the papers" (p. 414).

In 1863 Ruskin writes to his father: "I promised you to publish no more letters without letting you see them . . ." (p. 458). And there is reason to believe that his father exercised his discretion in the same year upon a reply of Ruskin's to an article by J. E. Cairnes (XVII, lxix).

It is not surprising, then, that after his father's death Ruskin can write to Burne-Jones in the following manner: "I had often measured my feeling to my father, as I thought; but I never had any conception of the way that I should have to mourn—not over what I lose, now, but over what I *have* lost *until* now" (XVIII, xxvii). This might easily be interpreted to mean that he had lost the freedom which would have enabled him to study and write what he chose. Of like import seems to be his letter to Henry Acland in 1864, where he speaks of "the loss of a father who would have sacrificed his life for his son,

and yet forced his son to sacrifice his life to him, and sacrifice it in vain" (XXXVI, 471). His letter to Charles Eliot Norton in 1868 is similar: "I have often thought of setting down some notes of my life, but I know not how. I should have to accuse my own folly bitterly; but not less, as far as I can judge, that of the fondest, faithfullest, most devoted, most mistaken parents that ever child was blest with, or ruined by" (p. 555).

It is at least plausible, then, to suppose that without persistent and effective parental discouragement Ruskin would have written his books on political economy ten years earlier than he did. When he finally took up the study in earnest, he went through current works on political economy merely to find support for preconceived ideas or to ridicule opponents. Of course, none can be sure that he would have done otherwise earlier under conditions of entire freedom. I believe, however, that those ten lost years would have enabled him to make a more orderly and significant contribution to the field of social economics.

Upon what evidence do critics base their belief that Ruskin is properly qualified as an economic theorist? William Smart, the first professional economist to take Ruskin's part against his orthodox opponents, stated in 1880 that Ruskin's attack was "founded on the perfectly just basis that Political Economists of the school of Mill and Ricardo, instead of analyzing the true economy of a State, had analyzed the modern outcome of wealth and money-making as it exists in the present corrupt state of society, and had taught their students that the deductions from this were the eternal laws of wealth and commerce." According to Smart, *Unto This Last* "expounds the true

economy of a State which takes for its first aim the healthy and happy life of the people." [8]

Four years later Patrick Geddes said that the tables were finally turned in the "shout of Sentiment versus Science." For all the science is on Ruskin's side, ". . . while on the other [is] too often sheer blindness to the actual facts of human and social life . . . concealed by illusory abstractions, baseless assumptions, and feeble metaphors stuck together with scholastic logic . . . ." Ruskin's teaching "equals or exceeds," Geddes' commentary continues, in "clear biological insight and social wisdom" any professional treatise, he is the "legitimate continuator of the Physiocratic school," and his demonstration of the relation between economics and morals will remain "permanently classic." [9]

In 1888 the American economist F. J. Stimson said that "the one great change" Ruskin is responsible for in the science is "in the element of *value*" and related concepts. Ruskin also deserves credit for a major part in destroying "that figment of the orthodox imagination, the 'economic man.'" Although the science "may not build from him directly," Stimson continues, the bricks for future building will be made "rather with Ruskin's earth than with Ricardo's straw." [10]

The next professional critic to support Ruskin's claims as a political economist was John A. Hobson. Since the present study is indebted to Hobson's analysis of Ruskin's constructive economy, discussion of Hobson's work on Ruskin will be reserved until later. Here it may be pointed out that Hobson gives Ruskin an important position in both the critical and constructive traditions of the science. Ruskin's first claim as a social reformer "is that he re-

formed Political Economy." And of his constructive theory Hobson says that by his reduction of the concepts of money-measured cost and utility to terms of human effort, suffering, and use he occupies a "truly scientific" position. Hobson adds: "It has been humorous to hear the dull drudges of commercial economics speaking contemptuously of an economist whose logic is far keener than their own, and whose work will hereafter be recognised as the first serious attempt in England to establish a scientific basis of economic study from the social standpoint." [11]

In the same year (1898) the chief English journal made an appeal to the profession to make use of Ruskin's economics. If the "firm of political economy" hopes to thrive in the future, says C. S. Devas, ". . . we must move our premises into a more respectable neighborhood; we must artistically decorate our shop front without, and keep a well-assorted stock of Ruskinian goods within. Else we may find our customers leaving us for the socialistic store, and ourselves on the way to the bankruptcy court." [12]

The usual intelligent professional attitude towards Ruskin's economic aptitude and accomplishments is well stated by R. T. Ely. Ruskin as an economic scientist is "guilty of gross errors" but he also "reveals scientific insight of a high order." The distinction between individual riches and social wealth "has been inadequately presented in classical economic literature," says Ely, and Ruskin "anticipated modern movements of scientific thought" in "sharply separating out the two lines of inquiry." [13]

This selection of views has been more or less favorable, but the reader should not assume that this study will deny countenance to unfavorable ones, which will be

taken up later in controversial setting. It may be said in passing, however, that most later critics qualified to judge in the matter have shown respect for Ruskin's economic writings, while those ignorant of the fundamental issues have usually treated his economic views with amused tolerance or with abuse.

Chapter II

RUSKIN'S INDICTMENT OF ORTHODOX POLITICAL ECONOMY

Ruskin's criticism of orthodox political economy, which will be treated in detail in this chapter, falls into three closely connected divisions: first, it is scornful of religion and Christian morality; second, it professes to be a science of human relations, and yet it abstracts from man all human characteristics and leaves only brutish ones; third, even on its own basis, that of a commercial science, orthodox political economy is a false science.

At the time (1860) when, it is conventional to suppose, Ruskin turned from art to political economy, we find him recording what he considered the irreligion and immorality of economic writers: " 'As no laws but those of the Devil are practicable in the world, so no impulses but those of the brute' (says the modern political economist) 'are appealable to in the world. Faith, generosity, honesty, zeal, and self-sacrifice are poetical phrases. None of these things can, in reality, be counted upon; there is no truth in man which can be used as a moving or productive power' " (VII, 448). So he states in *Modern Painters,* and two years later, in a letter to Dr. John Brown, he says, "The Science of Political Economy *is* a Lie,—wholly and to the very root (as hitherto taught) . . . . To this 'science,' and to this alone (the professed and organized pursuit of Money) is owing *All* the evil of modern days" (XVII, lxxxii).

In making such comments Ruskin is arguing from a

proposition which, if admitted, may warrant the conclusion he draws. He states that proposition unequivocally, as always: "You have founded an entire Science of Political Economy, on what you have stated to be the constant instinct of man—the desire to defraud his neighbor" (XXVII, 95). To test the truth of this, the minor premise of Ruskin's argument, is one of the main tasks which this and the next chapter set for themselves; on its truth depends in large part the soundness of Ruskin's indictment.

Political economy is a delusion, he says in *Unto This Last,* which is "based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection" (XVII, 25). He speaks of it as "that so-called science" and as an "entirely bastard one" (p. 485). In those whimsical schoolroom discussions of *The Ethics of the Dust* he speaks of the tumblebug as furnishing for him the image of its characteristic action, but even in his most serious works such humor lies just under the surface: "It is beautiful to see it at work, gathering its treasures (such as they are) into little round balls; and pushing them home with the strong wrong end of it,—head downmost all the way,—like a modern political economist with his ball of capital, declaring that a nation can stand on its vices better than on its virtues" (XVIII, 245). Horseless carriages—Ruskin would have deplored the fact—have destroyed the effectiveness of his little image!

One of the chief charges against political economy is that it arrogates a name which is misleading and immoral: "The study which lately in England has been called Political Economy is in reality nothing more than the investigation of some accidental phenomena of modern

commercial operations, nor has it been true in its investigation even of those" (XVII, 147). Ruskin states that real political economy consists in the study of "the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things" (p. 44). Since the qualities of usefulness and pleasurableness depend upon human capacity to use and enjoy, political economy "must be a science respecting human capacities and dispositions." But, he continues—quoting Mill's *Principles* and taking a characteristic sideswipe at its author—"moral considerations have nothing to do with political economy (III. i. 2). Therefore, moral considerations have nothing to do with human capacities and dispositions" (pp. 80-81). Thus, as Ruskin says elsewhere, ". . . the idea that directions can be given for the gaining of wealth, irrespectively of the considerations of its moral sources, or that any general and technical law of purchase and gain can be set down for national practice, is perhaps the most insolently futile of all that ever beguiled men through their vices" (p. 53).

Not only does political economy leave out of account the social affections, but it treats society as an aggregate of individuals motivated by private gain. Since it should mean "citizen's economy" (XVI, 9), it should pass beyond private gain and include national gain. The accepted current orthodox political economy, on the other hand, says Ruskin, is mercantile economy, concerned with "establishing the maximum inequality in our own favor." And it assumes that such inequalities are necessarily advantageous. But they cannot be advantageous unless attained rightly and used for the benefit of society. He illustrates the point with one of his favorite analogies:

"Thus the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in the natural body. There is one quickness of the current which comes of cheerful emotion or wholesome exercise; and another which comes of shame or of fever" (XVII, 46-48). Ruskin, then, considers "political economy" a misnomer when used to designate mercantile economy.

But even on its own basis, that of a mercantile science, orthodox political economy is a false science. Ruskin is especially desirous that his readers should not overlook this part of the indictment. When William Smart makes the following statement in *A Disciple of Plato*—"Ruskin does not object to Political Economy, so long as it is confessed *Mercantile Economy*"—Ruskin supplements Smart's text with this note: ". . . while I admit there is such a thing as mercantile economy, distinguished from social, I have always said that neither Mill, Fawcett, nor Bastiat knew the contemptible science they professed to teach" (p. lxxxiii).

Ruskin therefore wishes to emphasize the double nature of the charge, even though his equivocal comment on the professors is hard to interpret. Does he mean that they did not know how contemptible the science was? Is he saying that they did not know it firsthand and from practical experience? Does he mean that they did not know to what extent practical men applied the rules of orthodox political economy as rules of life? Does he mean that they have stated in an inadequate way the fundamental concepts of the science? Probably the last, but Ruskin, master of the implicative statement, sometimes becomes its victim.

It is clear, at any rate, that he charges the science with

falsity even within its self-imposed boundaries. In explaining his position to Charles Eliot Norton in several of the 1869 letters, Ruskin objects ". . . that you still confuse my morality with my economy, that you do not yet clearly see that I do not (in my books) dispute Mill's morality; but I flatly deny his *Economical science,* his, and all others of the school; . . . that they are *not* wise men—nor scientific men (nor—I say *here good* men); that they have an accursed semblance of being all these, which has deceived you and thousands more of *really* good and wise men . . ." (XXXVI, 583). Norton, one of Ruskin's closest friends, was provoked at the "arrogance" of some of the statements in the letters about Mill and others. Ruskin answers that such statements are the result of the "provocation I receive from the universal assumption that I know nothing of political economy, and am a fool . . . for talking of it." Ruskin urges Norton to "master the *real* principles of political economy." Then he says, ". . . I want you to say publicly in the *Atlantic Monthly,*—or elsewhere,—what you then will think of my political economy, and Mill's." In that way, Ruskin pleads, Norton could "authoritatively assist or check" him (p. 587). This was during the period when *Fors Clavigera* was taking shape in Ruskin's mind. Although there is evidence in Norton's little publication of 1853, *Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories,* that he was qualified for the task both by interest and ability, he never tried. But that is another story.

More specific charges against political economy which do not fit well into the scheme used above are (1) that no one has defined the terms it employs, such as "wealth" and "necessaries and conveniences" (XVII, 416, 418).

(2) Orthodox economics excludes the consideration of intrinsic value. As Ruskin explains at the beginning of *Munera Pulveris,* ". . . the first specialty of the following treatise consists in its giving at the outset, and maintaining as the foundation of all subsequent reasoning, a definition of Intrinsic Value, and Intrinsic Contrary-of-Value; the negative power having been left by former writers entirely out of account, and the positive power left entirely undefined" (p. 135). (3) Orthodox economics ignores spending: "And it is because of this (among many other such errors) that I have fearlessly declared your so-called science of Political Economy to be no science; because, namely, it has omitted the study of exactly the most important branch of the business—the study of *spending*" (XVIII, 451-452).

There seems to be little doubt that Ruskin is justified in insisting that economic man cannot be isolated from social man. As Harrison states it, Ruskin "does seize the root of the matter that there can be no rational political economy apart from a comprehensive Sociology." [1] Or as the economist John Kells Ingram, who in a speech delivered in 1878 to the British Association for the Advancement of Science arraigned orthodox economists more thoroughly than Ruskin could, put the matter, only a quack treats all diseases as purely local. The "characteristic fact" about the social system, says Ingram, is the "consensus of its different functions." "It is therefore impossible rationally to conceive or explain the industrial economy of society without taking into account the other coexisting social factors," he concludes.[2]

But qualified critics doubt Ruskin's charge that orthodox political economy is a false science when considered

on its own basis as a commercial science. Smart believes that this indictment results from misunderstanding on Ruskin's part. He could never see "anything like contradiction between the main lines of my friend's writings and the science he so frankly abused." Ruskin judged the orthodox science "rather by what he supposed it to be than from first-hand knowledge." [3] F. G. Masterman states that Ruskin and his opponents seem to be "fighting in totally different worlds." "Directly he commenced to define wealth as life," he says, "whereas they defined it as accumulation of money, there really is no connecting link between the one and the other . . . ." [4]

What is this misunderstanding with which friendly critics of Ruskin credit him? It results from Ruskin's conviction that there can be no science of commercial economy, at least on the lines of the traditional science, because its elementary conceptions are incapable of abstraction. Let us illustrate. Ruskin defines value as that which "avails towards Life." Value is intrinsic, and it will not avail towards life unless the valuable object is in the hands of a person who is able to appreciate true worth, a person endowed with acceptant capacity (XVII, 84-88). In pointing out the difference between this attitude and that of orthodox economists, it is well to notice the point in the history of economic theory at which intrinsic value and exchange value become definitely dissociated. Adam Smith says:

> The word VALUE, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called "value in use"; the other "value in exchange." The things which have the greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange; and, on the

contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange have frequently little or no value in use. . . . In order to investigate the principles which regulate the exchangeable value of commodities, I shall endeavor to show,

First, what is the real measure of this exchangeable value; or wherein consists the real price of all commodities.

Secondly, what are the different parts of which this real price is composed or made up.

And, lastly, what are the different circumstances which sometimes raise some or all of these different parts of price above, and sometimes sink them below their natural or ordinary rate. . . .[6]

He then proceeds to his exposition of the labor theory of value and thereafter speaks of real value (the amount of labor expended) and nominal value (the market price). Note, however, that this real value is not value in use or intrinsic value but real value in exchange, which Smith is comparing with nominal value in exchange.

Thus it may be observed that Adam Smith, after making the distinction between value in use and value in exchange, drops the former without further comment and begins his analysis of the latter, saying as clearly as he deems it necessary to say—that is, by disregarding it entirely after making his abstraction—that his inquiry purposes to deal only with exchange and not with use, that he has no intention of denying value in use but only of disregarding it for the purposes of his treatise. And Smith's procedure is justifiable. After all, he never intended that his political economy should be studied apart from its philosophical background. Did he not hold the chair of ethics at Glasgow? Was not political economy merely the branch of ethics in which he was chiefly interested? Had he not written *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* which considered the ethical postulates of human behavior? Was

he not free to write another which considered only the economic postulates?

Again, Ricardo, after beginning with Smith's distinction between value in use and value in exchange and stating that utility is "absolutely essential" to exchange value, thereafter takes it for granted and leaves it out of account: "Possessing utility commodities derive their exchangeable value from two sources: from their scarcity, and from the quantity of labour required to obtain them." [6] Now this utility which Ricardo takes for granted in a commodity is to Ruskin the same thing as value.[7] But with the elaboration of economic theory "utility" comes to mean economic utility. For instance, Jevons says that we must not confuse utility with usefulness: "Even that which is hurtful to a person may by ignorance be desired, purchased, and used; it then has utility." As to the "ultimate effects of actions," we must consult other sciences: "In economics we treat only of proximate effects." [8]

And most later economists are not inclined to discuss in their economic treatises the question of fundamental utility. For instance, Alfred Marshall states that "Utility and Want are used as correlative terms, having no ethical or prudential connotations." [9] He also says, after quoting Adam Smith's distinction between value in use and value in exchange, "But experience has shown that it is not well to use the word in the former sense." Value is the quantity of a second thing "which can be got there and then in exchange for the first" (p. 61).

It should be obvious, therefore, that different presuppositions necessitated different definitions of fundamental concepts and forced Ruskin and the orthodox economists into non-agreement. It may be that this non-agreement is

based upon misunderstanding on Ruskin's part. If so, it is the same sort of misunderstanding which is common among most twentieth-century critics when they pass judgment upon nineteenth-century economists. For example, Dean Inge says, "Ruskin's theory of value began to clash at once with the theory of value which he found generally accepted and almost universally acted upon. To the economist of his day value meant exchange-value." [10] Since this problem involves the methodological inquiry reserved for the third chapter, a short comment suffices here. The orthodox economist of Ruskin's day did *not* mean that "value meant exchange-value." He meant that value in exchange was the kind of value with which economics dealt.[11] Doubtless the science was too narrow. Doubtless moralists could scarcely convince practical men that they should recognize real value as well as exchange-value, especially when practical men armed themselves with what they understood to be the science of political economy and defied the moralists. But the assertion that such economists as Mill and Senior were without a sense of values morally higher than exchange-value is absurd, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

Before ending this terminological discussion it seems advisable to point out that word trouble is one of the greatest difficulties in economic investigation. Much of the present study concerns the understanding of words, both because Ruskin was greatly fascinated by word study and because economics, a science which uses the language of ordinary speech for scientific purposes, is apt to be interpreted in misleading senses. With the best will in the world it is possible for the non-professional reader of economics to misunderstand, and Ruskin had not the best

will in the world to understand contemporary economists.

In the passages from Ruskin's works considered at the beginning of this chapter there is an assumption that current political economy and current industry fall under a similar indictment. Ruskin asserts, indeed, that political economy is to blame for the evils of current industry. As he says to the manufacturers at Bradford in the second lecture of *The Crown of Wild Olive,* "And all our hearts have been betrayed by the plausible impiety of the modern political economist . . ." (XVIII, 455). Is there any justification for Ruskin's assertion? There is little evidence that Ruskin read the political economists, none that he read them carefully and with sympathy. There are only the copy of Mill's *Principles* with Ruskin's notes in the margins (XXXIV, 708-709), and the scattered quotations from economic treatises in his works from 1860 onwards. The testimony of his friends Frederic Harrison and William Smart is that he did not understand the traditional political economy. But though he may have known little about political economists and their writings, he believed that many industrialists, in Parliament and out, regulated their conduct by what they considered, or professed to consider, the doctrines of political economy. And he was content with his *post hoc:* he could scarcely have been unaware of the fallacy of his reasoning. On the other hand, he despised an investigation that professed to treat human conduct as a science, and he was convinced that the doctors of the science were either malevolent or stupid. Ruskin is possibly justified in his attack on political economy. Or if not justified, then he can assuredly be excused for interpreting the statements of its professors in the same way as did many industrialists. The moralist was free to

use for purposes of attack the interpretation which the businessman used for purposes of good business.

Of course, Ruskin was not the first, nor was he the last, to blame political economists for the misconduct of business and government. Besides English literary strictures on the dismal science, European economists and social reformers had made similar charges since the publication of Sismondi's *Nouveaux Principes* in 1827. The English economist Richard Jennings said five years before *Unto This Last* was published that political economy should "regard simultaneously both Mankind and Wealth." In ancient Sparta bodily health was nourished at the expense of everything else, he says. Now the "opposite extreme" prevails, and ". . . whilst this object is exclusively regarded, the stature of the majority of the people becomes stunted, their health impaired, their limbs distorted, . . . females are corrupted and brutalized, and children are suffered to grow up in ignorance, impatient, and unskilled, if not cut off by untimely Labour . . . ." [12]

In his treatise on Ruskin, Hobson agrees with Ruskin that political economy is guilty of direct defense and encouragement of industry's reckless disregard of real worth, human and otherwise (pp. 99 ff.). In his later comments Hobson alludes to this guilt as a self-evident fact: "The profiteers and their academic mercenaries were easily able to laugh out of consideration the whims and fads of this literary word painter . . . ." [13] And Edwin Cannon indicts modern economists on the same score. "Economists have no right to wash their hands of the matter and say it is not their fault that the mind of the public is an

Augean stable," he says. "It is their job to cleanse it, and they have had two hundred years to do it in." [14]

Ruskin's passages quoted indict political economy for its practical effect in tying the hands of reformers and in directing awry the conduct of businessmen. And the other opinions given indicate that some economists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consider the unethical conduct of business as either motivated or condoned by the science of political economy. Has it been the purpose of political economy, then, to give precept to business and government or merely to study existent conditions? The older writers on the subject encompassed both purposes; later ones attempted to exclude the former and to construct a descriptive science. Palgrave's *Dictionary of Political Economy* summarizes the problem as follows. Practical considerations have always been uppermost in the minds of economists. The science has only in the twentieth century "ceased to be ancillary" to such considerations. "Economists may now insist with him [Mill] that their subject, *qua* science, has nothing to do with the 'do this; avoid that' of art, yet M'Culloch, no less than Smith, speaks of a practical 'object' for the 'science' . . . ." It concludes significantly: "And finally, the repudiation by economists of any essential standpoint beyond that of scientific analysis and prediction, has been to some extent one of self-defence against the attacks directed by ethical writers at the apparently anti-social 'teachings' of their 'dismal science' " (III, 366-367).

The fallacy of the orthodox economists of Ruskin's day seems to have been one of exclusiveness. On this score Ingram takes to task two of the most influential economists. J. E. Cairnes, Ingram says, tells us that political

economy can help us in forming our opinions on social questions by furnishing data but can never dictate final judgments. Such indifferentism "amounts to an entire paralysis of political economy as a social power capable of producing or confirming in the mass of the community just convictions on the most important of all subjects." He says also that when Senior catches himself making remarks about working mothers, severe and incessant labor, and the benefits of leisure, he always apologizes for introducing "considerations which have no influence on wealth." Ingram calls this "the very pedantry of purism." [15]

These economists—Ingram as well as those whom he criticizes—assumed that political economy is one inquiry with one procedure, whereas the best later opinion is for dividing the science into several branches. John Neville Keynes states that former writers on the subject keep only one aspect in view and reject others which are equally important and that therefore in their controversies "Methods are attacked for not doing what those who advocate their use have never imagined they could do; and the qualifications and limitations, with which each side expounds its own method, are overlooked by the other side." [16] This leads naturally into the questions—and significant questions they are in the light of Ruskin's indictment—one, is the accepted political economy of Ruskin's day a study of what is or a study of what ought to be? two, is it a pure or an applied science? These questions should be deferred until after a presentation of the point of view of orthodox political economy, which will be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter III

ORTHODOX POLITICAL ECONOMY

The consideration of Ruskin's indictment of orthodox economics indicates that he may have been justified in his attack. But we are not yet ready to pass judgment, for we have heard only the plaintiff. Literary critics in general do not know how sound Ruskin's indictment is, because they apparently are unfamiliar with the postulates and conclusions of orthodox economics. Also their judgment of Ruskin's economics has been favorable or unfavorable according as they have heard or read favorable or unfavorable professional criticism. The average economist, however, even though he may sympathize with Ruskin, bases his judgment on fragmentary knowledge of Ruskin's works. True, John A. Hobson, one of the most distinguished of twentieth-century economists, was a student of Ruskin. However, Hobson has his own ax to grind and upholds Ruskin's indictment with the more vigor because it is his own. This does not mean necessarily that Ruskin and Hobson are wrong. But since Hobson, the only qualified economist who has written at length on Ruskin's economics, is an economic heretic himself, it is advisable to see that the orthodox devils get their due, especially as Hobson and other professional critics take for granted the reader's acquaintance with the orthodox standpoint. The literary investigator, however, is ordinarily unaware of that standpoint and is therefore inclined to accept the distorted summaries usually given by Ruskin's biographers and other commentators.

Every science begins as a body of observed fact and only later permits of theoretical formulation. Political economy is no exception. Therefore, in searching among the English economists for formal statements of scope and method, we must pass over Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo and make inquiry of Senior, J. S. Mill, Cairnes, and Bagehot.

Nassau William Senior (1790-1864) opens his *Political Economy* by distinguishing the science as he understands it from the more general science of society contemplated by his English and continental predecessors. To Steuart the chief object of the science is "to provide every thing necessary for supplying the wants of society." To Storch political economy is the "Science of the natural laws which determine the prosperity of nations." Sismondi says its object is to consider "the physical welfare of man." McCulloch, Senior says, after defining it as the "Science of Values," then adds that its object is to ascertain the means by which wealth is produced, accumulated, divided, and "most advantageously consumed." Senior believes, however, that a clearer, more constructive science will result from "confining the reader's attention to the Nature, Production, and Distribution of Wealth." And he defines wealth as ". . . those things, and those things only, which are transferable, are limited in supply, and are directly or indirectly productive of pleasure or preventive of pain; or, to use an equivalent expression, which are susceptible of *exchange* . . . or to use a third equivalent expression, which have *Value* . . . ." [1] Therefore it cannot be doubted that Senior makes clear his abstract definition of wealth, however unwise he and his whole tribe may have been in thus restricting the meaning of the term.[2]

In Senior's definition of his science the exclusion of the term "consumption" should be noted. The orthodox economists, indeed, seldom treated this branch of economics, except in their unhappy distinction between productive and unproductive consumption. Even the term "distribution" in his definition is subject to strict qualification, for he says that political economy does not consider the questions of whether the possession of wealth is beneficial to an individual or to society, what kind of distribution is most desirable, or how such distribution can be facilitated (p. 2). Without discussing the distinction in this place, it should be noted that Ruskin's whole economy seems to fall under Senior's exclusions. May we not, then, pronounce Ruskin's economy supplementary rather than antithetical? Such pronouncement is premature, but the question is one that must remain before us.

It should be noticed here, however, that Senior—and in this distinction between political economy and the surrounding field of social science he represents all of his school—does not minimize the importance of the broader study. On the contrary, he says that the political economist should not allow himself "to wander into the more interesting and more important, but far less definite, fields by which the comparatively narrow path of Political Economy is surrounded" (*Idem*). The discussion is largely a terminological one and to the uninitiated seems a futile quibble, especially since nothing but misunderstanding results from it. Orthodox economists never confine their attention to what they consider the purely scientific aspects of their science. They actually are political philosophers who use economic science as a tool. It is to be regretted, however, that the analytical British

mind demanded for so long that the definite theoretical line be drawn between strict political economy and those other subjects which political economists indeed treated, but in doing so always felt that they had to apologize. In the twentieth century the same controversy has continued, but there seems to be more tolerance of diversity of method and content. Though there are still formal dissenters, anything is an economic problem nowadays which economists in the serious pursuit of their investigations feel called upon to treat.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) begins his essay on method by outlining a science of society which "embraces every part of man's nature." He then delimits the science of political economy as follows: "It is concerned with him solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end. It predicts only such of the phenomena of the social state as take place in consequence of the pursuit of wealth." This he follows with a statement which, though it does not justify the *a priori* method in economics, conclusively answers Ruskin's charge that political economists consider mankind brutish: "Not that any political economist was ever so absurd as to suppose that mankind are really thus constituted, but because this is the mode in which science must necessarily proceed." Having abstracted from reality in pursuance of his scientific method, the economist must not apply his results without reinstating the actual.

Then Mill defines the unit of his science, the much maligned "economic man." Just as geometry conceives of a line as having length but not breadth so political economy presupposes man "as' a being who invariably

does that by which he may obtain the greatest amount of necessaries, conveniences, and luxuries, with the smallest quantity of labour and physical self-denial with which they can be obtained in the existing state of knowledge." But the actions of this hypothetical, or fictional, man do not even indicate, much less justify, the conduct of actual man. For he says that "whenever a political economist has shown that, by acting in a particular manner, a labourer may obviously obtain higher wages, a capitalist larger profits, or a landlord higher rent," he will not conclude that they will "as a matter of course . . . certainly act in that manner." [3]

Ruskin has been given deserved credit in the exorcism of this economic bogey man, and there is no need to disparage his accomplishment in this respect. Apparently, however, the hypothetical man has been more abused by non-professionals than misused by professionals. Some such concept has been found necessary by all pure economic theorists, just as doctors are interested in man as he is subject to disease. Though it is alleged that the economic man has disappeared, Hobson believes that he has just changed his name: ". . . the notion that all qualitative differences can be resolved into quantitative may be regarded as the modern substitute for that economic man moving in the 'simple system of natural liberty' by which vested interests defended themselves against dangerous assaults in the earlier era of modern capitalism." [4] Hobson contests the value of the abstraction involved in marginal theory with far more specialized wisdom than Ruskin employed when he penned his famous image of men without skeletons (XVII, 26). Yet the majority of twentieth-century economists believe that there is

virtue in marginal theory just as in Ruskin's day economists found justification for production-cost theory. It may be that, as Hobson suggests, the popularity of both systems can be traced partly to their protection of vested interests. It may be, on the other hand, that an abstract commercial science is an essential scientific study. Ruskins and Hobsons may then be invaluable in pointing to new and profitable fields of sociological research; they cannot by so doing discount, in the minds of specialized students, the more abstract inquiry.

Let us return for a moment to Mill. It has been said by many commentators that though in Mill's earlier essay on method he characterizes his science as *a priori* and abstract, when he comes to apply his method in his *Principles* he finds that method impracticable. There seems to be no such contradiction in Mill's theory and practice. He does say that the political economist as such cannot apply his science to actual conditions; but he professes to be more than a political economist. He considers his science merely as a tool to be used to ascertain the laws of sequence and coexistence in economic phenomena. Therefore he calls his later work *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*. In so entitling it and employing in it other than strict economic reasoning, he is not departing from his earlier theoretical platform. Since Ruskin singles out Mill as his chief antagonist, he will occupy our attention further in the discussion of *Unto This Last*.

The history of the economic theory developed by the political economists here under consideration presents a succession of sallies into and retreats from the general field of social science. The various generals adopted various

tactics in defense of the theoretical citadel: some attempted to strengthen the walls, some to subdue the surrounding country, some to make common cause with the enemy and destroy the fortifications, retaining only the observation towers. Whether or not by making concessions Mill intended to desert his Ricardian fortress, nine years after the publication of Mill's *Principles,* James Elliot Cairnes (1823-1875) felt it necessary to restate orthodox theory in its more abstract form. Cairnes begins by stating his acceptance of certain fundamentals which, while not uncontested, are agreed upon by the English school of economists from Smith to Mill: "... that 'wealth,' the subject matter of Political Economy, *is* susceptible of scientific treatment; that there *are* laws of its production and distribution; . . . that a knowledge of these laws of the production and distribution of wealth is a desirable and useful acquisition; . . . that the study of those principles and motives of human conduct which are brought into play in the pursuit of wealth is not incompatible with the sentiments and duties of religion and morality."

That is, Cairnes, in common with the rest of his school, considers political economy an inquiry which abstracts from general social science the specific problem of what that school calls wealth, a consciously abstract form of wealth consisting only of exchangeable quantities. Cairnes is even willing to relinquish the name, but not the discrete inquiry: "Even if it should be thought desirable to give the *name* of Political Economy to the larger inquiry, it would still be necessary to reserve for separate and distinct investigation the laws of the production and distribution of wealth." [5] Thus Ruskin's point that orthodox economy falsely arrogates the name of political economy

is granted without argument, and all of his impassioned denial is so much fireworks. Perhaps. But the problem is not so simple as that. Ruskin's objection is not merely the fact that the professors of orthodox economy assume a false name for their highly restricted study but the fact that their falsely named economy is understood and applied *as if* it encompassed a complete societal theory. Regardless of what political economy is supposed by scholars to be, Ruskin asserts that it abets mammonism. Cairnes says that political economy abets nothing; it stands neutral among systems and gives no advice. Ruskin ignores the fact that political economy gives no advice, being only too aware that advice is taken by practical men. Ruskin's position here is very strong. To the scientists who formulated the natural laws of political economy those laws were statements of human tendencies which never operate in isolation, or as they always said, which are subject to the qualification *ceteris paribus.* To practical men those laws assumed the aspect either of justice or of inevitability. And we cannot say that the scientists were entirely justified and the practical men entirely benighted. It is difficult to exclude normative implications from descriptive statements.

Cairnes then emphasizes his most important methodological point: political economy is a science like astronomy, chemistry, or physics, and as such is free to work out its problems unhampered by considerations of application. It also "stands apart from all particular systems, and is, moreover, absolutely neutral as between all." Though Cairnes insists on the neutral aspect of his science, however, it is not that he makes light of its practical application. He is only pointing out that the application is not

the science itself but the use of its results. The data "may indeed go far to determine our judgment" but should not always do so, "For there are few practical problems which do not present other aspects than the purely economical—political, moral, educational, artistic aspects—and these may involve consequences so weighty as to turn the scale against purely economic solutions. On the relative importance of such conflicting considerations Political Economy offers no opinion, pronounces no judgment . . ." (pp. 34-37). This conception of economics has been retained by the successors of the orthodox political economists. Marshall is speaking of the circumscribed traditional science when he says that economics has been more successful than any other social science because of its greater definiteness and exactness.[6]

Hobson, the most famous critic of the modern classical school, argues against the curtailment of scope which makes possible such scientific precision: "The notion that, by setting groups of students to work at gathering, testing, measuring and tabulating crude facts . . . valuable truths of wide application will somehow be spontaneously generated, and that by a purely inductive process there will come to light general laws authoritative for social policy, is entirely destitute of foundation. The humblest grubber among 'facts' must approach them with some equipment of questions, hypotheses, and methods of classification, all of which imply the acceptance of principles derived from a wider field of thought." [7] As this study proceeds, it will become apparent how closely Hobson's criticism follows that of Ruskin. Hobson, indeed, was what Ruskin might have been, had the latter given his life to the study of economics.

Now let us observe the point of view of Walter Bagehot (1826-1877), the last of the economists chosen as exponents of the orthodox method of investigation. Bagehot is ahead of his time, at least ahead of other members of his school, in pointing out that English political economy, as he calls it, is not the only possible one. "There may be any number of political economies," he says, "according as the subject is divided off in one way or in another; and in this way all may be useful if they do not interfere with one another, or attempt to rule further than they are proved." He has a double purpose in calling his own school English political economy. Not only was it developed for the most part by Englishmen but it utilizes abstractions referable only to conditions like those of modern England. Even when "competent persons" understand that English political economy deals only with "imaginary" men, they do not often understand that "the world which our political economists treat of is a very limited and peculiar world also." He continues, "They often imagine that what they read is applicable to all states of society . . . whereas it is only true of—and only proved as to—states of society in which commerce has largely developed, and where it has taken the form of development, or something near the form, which it has in England." [8] On this last point there is considerable divergence of opinion among the four orthodox economists here considered. Bagehot represents one extreme. Senior represents the other, in that he believes that natural laws can be established which are independent of time and place and applied to actual conditions with only slight modification. On this point Mill is closer to Senior, in theory at any rate. Cairnes is closer to Bagehot.[9] Ruskin's statement at the beginning of *Munera*

Pulveris is interesting in this regard: "The study which lately in England has been called Political Economy is in reality nothing more than the investigation of some accidental phenomena of modern commercial operations . . ." (XVII, 147).

To Bagehot, then, political economy is a science that takes an abstract view of man in a particular kind of society. He also points out that it takes an abstract view of wealth. Natural benefits such as air and sunlight mean nothing in political economy because everybody is able to get them: " 'Wealth' is not such for economical purposes unless it is scarce and transferable, and so desirable that some one is anxious to give something for it" (p. 348). Finally, such an abstract science has only limited applicability to real conditions. It is a science of tendencies. The "computed results of the larger isolated forces will never exactly happen," because those forces never occur in isolation (p. 321). Of course, Bagehot, like the other orthodox economists, is less abstract in practice than in theory. They all use their "laws" hypothetically and then limit them by means of particular occurrences in society, whereas the so-called historical economists, with whom they are often contrasted, attempt to start with the occurrences themselves and use deduction only later to interpret results. Therefore a fact may occupy the same logical position in the argument of the best exponents of both schools but a different chronological position.

This part of the investigation should include a brief consideration of two concepts always associated with orthodox economics: natural law and *laissez-faire*. Of the first Gide says that only by means of a substructure of natural law did this school hope to transform a body of truths or

facts into science.[10] He states in his *Principles,* as noted in the introduction, that "These laws are in no way opposed to man's liberty or to individual effort . . . . They are, on the contrary, merely the expression of the relations which arise spontaneously between men living in society when left to themselves and free to act according to their interests."

Such argument constitutes rational theory but theory which is inapplicable to actual society. It is impossible to formulate so-called natural laws without sanctioning their action and thus opposing man's liberty and individual effort. If a thing is natural, the man in the street considers every modification unnatural, regardless of fine-spun reasoning. This point needs emphasis in relation to our study. Ruskin accuses orthodox economists of malicious intent. Such a charge is so palpably ridiculous that it accounts for the bitter or amused opposition to his economic writing. Ruskin may have been unaware of the scientific attitude, as many have said he was. On the other hand, he may have regarded the scientific intent as irrelevant, being aware that orthodox economists were the helpless victims of their own theories. If statesmen had been wise enough to apply orthodox economy as suggested by the best theorists, all would have been well. But they were not, and their half-wisdom dictated unmodified application of economic theory. The record is filled with illustrations of this tragic state of cross-purposes. One will suffice: "All this time, the attitude of English statesmen was one of indifference. In 1845, the Devon commission laid bare the fatal defects of the Irish land system and suggested sensible remedies. But no proposals for reform could make headway in face of the prevalent

doctrine of *laissez-faire*. Private property was regarded as sacred, and the principles of the classical political economy were invoked in support of a policy of inaction. It was in vain that the economists themselves pointed out the uselessness of maintaining the forms of free contract when the reality was absent." [11]

This leads into Gide's second statement, that concerning *laissez-faire:* "But the Classical school itself thought of *Laissez-faire* neither as a dogma nor a scientific axiom. It was treated merely as a practical rule which it was to follow, not in every case, but wherever a better had not been discovered" (p. 357). That is true. Even Senior, for many years the butt of commentators who speak of *laissez-faire* economists, can be exonerated. As Redvers Opie says, "Henceforth the picture of Senior as a person entrenched in the reactionary doctrines of ruthless *laissez-faire* should be discredited." It was a fact that he did not like the existing poor law, that he detested paternalism, and that he often opposed government interference. He felt that the "onus of proof lay upon those who would interfere." But he was certain, Opie continues with a quotation from Senior's works, that "the most fatal of all errors would be the general admission of the proposition that government has no right to interfere for any purpose except for that of affording protection . . . ." [12]

John Maynard Keynes also attempts to acquit nineteenth-century economists of responsibility for *laissez-faire:* "No such doctrine is really to be found in the writings of the greatest authorities. It is what the popularizers and the vulgarizers said . . . . The language of the economists lent itself to the *laissez-faire* interpretation. But the popularity of the doctrine must be laid at the door of the political

philosophers of the day, whom it happened to suit, rather than of the political economists." After quoting Cairnes' statement that "The maxim of *laissez-faire* has no scientific basis whatever, but is at best a mere handy rule of practice," Keynes says, "This, for fifty years past, has been the view of all leading economists. . . . Nevertheless the guarded and undogmatic attitude of the best economists has not prevailed against the general opinion that an individualistic *laissez-faire* is both what they ought to teach and what they in fact do teach." [13] But the difficulty remains despite explanations. It lies in part in the fact that those conditions which might be supposed to result from *laissez-faire* are the same as those hypothetical conditions "which arise spontaneously between men living in society when left to themselves and free to act according to their own interests." That is, *laissez-faire* acquires the aspect of natural law. It is an instance of two hypothetical arguments lending plausibility to each other because they are not recognized as fundamentally the same. Of course, this fundamental similarity of natural law and *laissez-faire* seems to be due chiefly to the fact that both concepts are a part of the cultural awareness of the former age; more specifically, they result from the set of preconceptions that allowed the physiocrats and Adam Smith a faith in the "divine hand" which was denied to their nineteenth-century counterparts. At any rate, it is easy to see why *laissez-faire* and orthodox political economy were confused in the common mind in Ruskin's day and are confused by present historians.

Sidney Webb believes that British economists *are* partly to blame for the confusion. In a review of Keynes' book he states that if in their own treatises they did not "in-

dulge in the shallow optimism of Bastiat," they seldom corrected the extravagances of popularizers, and they did not always give their classes fare of proper quality. "In reply to some forgotten criticism, expressed or implied," Webb says in recalling a conversation with a professor forty years before, "he assured me that whenever he found a really able student, who was likely to devote himself to economics, he always took care to explain to him how little validity there was in the popular versions of economic doctrine that were generally current; and he went the length of expounding to him the exact scientific truth in all its complexity." [14]

A slightly different approach may prove helpful in the further consideration of this problem of misunderstanding and responsibility for misinterpretation which constitutes the focal point of much of the argument of the present study. Ruskin apparently misunderstood orthodox political economy, but such misunderstanding was general among his lay contemporaries, some of whom, industrialists especially, profited immensely by their misunderstanding. Others—moralists, socialists, aestheticians—blamed orthodox economists for what seemed their encouragement of unfettered materialism. But if orthodox political economy was popularly misunderstood, if its rules could not be applied without working havoc in nineteenth-century society, if orthodox economists were victimized by their own science, either the science was so fallacious as to be impracticable or the attempt was made to apply it to societal phenomena for which it was unsuited. The latter hypothesis seems the more plausible of the two.

All science studies natural phenomena.[15] Without here

considering the implications of the word "natural," we may take it for granted that social science studies phenomena dependent upon given societal arrangements. Whatever normative pretensions a social science may have, its statics must rest upon life as it is. Then, unless society remains as it is, a social science studying and describing the phenomena of one epoch becomes more or less inapplicable in another epoch. The question, therefore, is this: Was the political and industrial environment of Adam Smith's day sufficiently similar to the factory civilization of early nineteenth-century England to justify the nineteenth-century economists' statement that Adam Smith founded their science? Some authorities have answered the question in the negative. But since many general commentators seem unaware of this answer or even of the significance of the question, the evidence should be reviewed.

The view most consistent with fact seems to be that the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) contemplates a society so different from that of the succeeding century as to negate Smith's great work for practical purposes in the later period. Toynbee states that England as "described by Adam Smith differed more from the England of today than it did from the England of the middle ages." [16] Cliffe-Leslie says that Smith "lived in a very early industrial world," that mining and weaving were not yet utilizing the steam engine when the *Wealth of Nations* was composed, and that therefore labor markets had not become unsettled. He concludes that because of Smith's "positive doctrine" and because of "his close attention to the realities," it is certain that "had he lived even two generations later, his general theory of the organization of the economic

world and the results of the competition for economic life would have been cast in a very different mould." [17] Eli Ginsberg's *House of Adam Smith* (1934) contains an interesting development of the same thesis, though Mr. Ginsberg apparently believes it is his own idea. In Adam Smith's day, he says, the public was subject to exploitation by "the intimate allegiance between the merchant princes and the state," so that the great economist sought to check "injurious class legislation" by the advocacy of *laissez-faire*. But the developing industrial revolution after Smith's death changed the entire social context so that "Within as short a period as twenty-five years, English writers had become completely oblivious to the motivation of Adam Smith in propounding his thesis of freedom" (p. 172). Thus Ginsberg indicts not only businessmen but writers for the abuse of the spirit of Adam Smith. An important part of his argument is that later political economists made a Bible of the *Wealth of Nations* and then used it to support their own texts: "It was an artful game of words and possibly the novices did not realize that it was nothing but a gambol" (p. 8).

The evidence is strong, then, that Adam Smith's text was misapplied by his so-called followers. And indeed it has always seemed one of the ironies of the history of thought that the greatest of English political economists showed a clear preference for agrarianism and yet became the reputed father of the urban factory economy known as Manchesterism, that he championed the rights of common laborers and yet is thought to have forged an instrument which deprived them of their rights, that he is one of the greatest of modern moralists and yet was invoked as authority for immoral practices of trade and manu-

facture. At any rate, from this direction also we have arrived at the same impasse of misunderstanding, misapplication, and confusion of intents and purposes.

In so far as Ruskin's indictment applies to the work of the best exponents of nineteenth-century orthodox political economy, it is unsound. In so far as his indictment applies to the misuse of that doctrine by politicians and industrialists, it is sound. As to whether the economists were to blame for the misapplication of their theories, we shall have to content ourselves with a suspension of judgment. But the evidence that forces us into this uncomfortable position also enables us to get a clearer idea of Ruskin's place in relation to that of his professional contemporaries.

Chapter IV

RUSKIN'S CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Ruskin's constructive economy is often thought to consist of the suggestions for social regeneration developed chiefly in *Time and Tide* and *Fors Clavigera.* For instance, Gide emphasizes the following points in summarizing Ruskin's doctrine: everybody should work—and everybody should do *some* manual labor—because it is immoral to live on other people's work, even an ancestor's; the remuneration for this work should be set by custom, as Ruskin says it is in professions such as law and medicine, never by short-term supply and demand; natural resources should be nationalized; education, the most important item in the national economy, is the responsibility of the nation.[1] The importance of such items, incorporating in part Ruskin's plans for social reform and in part the instructions given to his utopian St. George's Guild, cannot be minimized in a treatment of the political economy. Some of them have been considered and some of them will be considered further in this chapter and the succeeding one. But Gide's summary leaves out of account Ruskin's chief contribution to constructive economic theory: the development of the concepts social utility and social cost.

Since John A. Hobson (1858-1940) is the only critic who examines this aspect of Ruskin's doctrine, his analysis will be relied upon chiefly here.[2] Some study of Hobson is therefore appropriate, as testimony is more valuable if the character of the witness is known. Also a knowledge

of Hobson's place among economists is necessary in order that the following situation may be understood. In 1898, as has already been noted, Hobson wrote a clear statement of Ruskin's high position among critics of the orthodox political economy and among contributors to a sane modern economy. Ruskin, he said, "has laid a solid foundation of social economics as the science of the relation of efforts and satisfactions in a society," and his work "will hereafter be recognised as the first serious attempt in England to establish a scientific basis of economic study from the social standpoint." [3] Yet thirty-eight years thereafter Ruskin's contribution was so little known as to make surprising news in a weekly magazine,[4] and all but careful and sympathetic students are unaware of the dignity of his standing as a constructive theorist. Besides, Hobson's book has long been out of print—which of course may not be a judgment on the value of the book. The explanation seems to be that Hobson, at the time he wrote his critique of Ruskin, was not of the camp of the sufficiently orthodox himself. Nine years before, Hobson was cast off by his profession because of a heretical book on the fallacy of over-saving, or as more recent treatments term it, under-consumption.[5] J. M. Keynes, whose *General Theory,* perhaps the most important economic work of the twentieth century, is among other things a treatment of this same fallacy, speaks of Hobson's book as the "first and most significant of many volumes in which for nearly fifty years Mr. Hobson has flung himself with unflagging, but almost unavailing, ardour and courage against the ranks of orthodoxy." [6] Hobson himself gives a sprightly account of the horror of conventional economists at the appearance of his book. Through their

instrumentality he was removed from two lectureships. "Even then," he says, "I hardly realized that in appearing to question the virtue of unlimited thrift I had committed the unpardonable sin." Hobson points out that the "heresy" had a long history in English thought from Shaftesbury to Malthus, but that it remained unrecognized in the nineteenth century because of England's dominant industrial position. He adds, "If Britain had been an isolated economic community (as now too late we are seeking to become) we should have been brought up against the limit of effective saving long ago." [7] Of course, this heresy is also an important part of Ruskin's consumption economy. As he says in *Unto This Last*, ". . . capital which produces nothing but capital is only root producing root, . . . seed issuing in seed, never in bread" (XVII, 98).

Now Hobson as a controversialist must not be held strictly to account for failing to present fully his opponents' case. A literary commentator attempting to understand Ruskin, however, cannot take without modification Hobson's criticism of the orthodox economists, a criticism which is essentially the same as Ruskin's. In his book on Ruskin, Hobson assumes that the tenets of orthodox economics are either unsound or outmoded, but thirty-eight years later Keynes could say that classical theory "dominates the economic thought, both practical and theoretical, of the governing and academic classes of this generation, as it has for a hundred years past" (p. 3). If the dominant school of economics has not been able to countenance Hobson, it is not surprising that literary commentators have not relied greatly upon Hobson's interpretation of Ruskin's economics. The most distinguished

of Ruskin's commentators, Hobson might be considered Ruskin's disciple. It is perhaps more accurate to say that he is an original social economist who always admired and defended Ruskin. However, this opinion may be considered untenable in the face of Hobson's own statement. Of Ruskin's influence he speaks as follows in his *Confessions:* "From him I drew the basic thought for my subsequent economic writing . . ." (p. 42).

The conventional order here would be to proceed from Ruskin to Hobson. The material will be more meaningful, however, if Hobson's economy is considered first, since it is more logically developed than that of Ruskin and since by this method Hobson's exposition of Ruskin's economy should then be more intelligible. As *Work and Wealth* (1914) is the only one of Hobson's many books in which the author attempts anything like a complete rendition of his social theory, the main points of his argument will be taken from this work. He begins with a typical Ruskinian indictment of theorists and practitioners: though consumption is formally recognized as the goal of industry, economic science takes almost no notice of the product after it passes over the counter. "The accepted conception of the Art of Political Economy," he says, "is that it is directed to the production of wealth whose value is attested by the purely quantitative calculus of money, and the Science of Political Economy is virtually confined to discovering and formulating the laws for the production of such wealth." And the reason for the "increasing devotion" to monetary problems is a recognition that the science is not equipped to handle problems into which "closely human considerations enter." Then Hobson points out the relationship of his

social economy to that of Ruskin: "By far the most brilliant and effective of these criticisms, that of John Ruskin, was expressly formulated in terms of vital value. The defects which he found in current economic science were substantially the same as those which we have noted . . . . and his insistence that all concrete wealth or money income must be estimated in relation to the vital cost of its production and the vital utility of its consumption, is the evidently accurate standpoint for a human valuation of industry" (pp. 4-10).

Hobson then explains his organic concept of society. He finds two qualities in animal and savage behavior not usually associated with the industrial habits of advanced peoples: one, all actions which possess survival value are endowed with a "pleasure bonus," two, the "instinctive economy" permits little individuality; that is, the "dominant drive of its implicit purpose is specific." The full import of the first point is evident when one considers the emphasis both Hobson and Ruskin place upon the necessity of the workman's finding pleasure in his work. The second point Hobson develops as follows: "Thus the displacement of the instinctive by the rational economy is . . . attended with grave risks due to the tendency towards an over-assertion of the individual self and a consequent weakening of the forces making for specific life. Man . . . may refuse to make as a matter of rational choice those personal efforts and sacrifices for family and race which no animal, subject to the drive of instinct, is able to 'think' of refusing" (pp. 20-22). Though his language is in the tradition of Darwin and Spencer rather than of Ruskin, this is Hobson's attempt to show that a social or national economy is, in the stage of advanced

civilization, the only rational economy, just as in the animal and primitive stages the "specific" economy is the only one possessing an amount of biological utility adequate for survival.

It is evident that Hobson is, like Ruskin, a social economist, and he uses various adjectives to indicate the nature of his economy—"social," "national," "organic," "human" —by all of which words he means to distinguish his type from mercantile, or industrial, economy. So the conventional science of economics cannot furnish him with a standard of value suitable for his purposes. To express business costs in terms of human costs we must know three things: "1. The quality and kind of the various human efforts involved in the business 'cost.' 2. The capacities of the human beings who give out these efforts. 3. The distribution of the effort among those who give it out." In discussing this production analysis Hobson says that industry as traditionally organized "treats all forms of productive human effort as marketable goods." The "human economy," on the other hand, insists that such effort should contain "a minimum of painful or injurious or otherwise undesirable activity." It also requires that those who suffer the "human cost" of this undesirable effort be those most capable of performing it, and that the time and pace of the work be such as "to reduce the human cost per unit to a minimum."

To balance this production analysis and to correct the neglect by orthodox economists of what Ruskin called "exactly the most important part of the business," Hobson formulates the consumption analysis. Here we must know "1. The quality and kind of the satisfaction or utility yielded by the 'economic utility' that is sold to consumers.

2. The capacities of the consumers who get this 'economic utility.' 3. The distribution of the economic utility among the consuming public." On this side of the question, the analysis of consumption utility, Hobson says that money is not the proper index of utility because many of the so-called "goods" sold are not only devoid of utility but are "repositories of disutility." The amount of utility to be got from products depends on the capacity of the consumer and "a true economy of consumption" involves distribution of goods "among consumers in proportion to their capacity to use them for purposes of welfare" (pp. 36-37).

This indicates sufficiently the main argument of *Work and Wealth,* but several other distinctly Ruskinian items should be noted briefly. Hobson attaches great importance to education in both the production and consumption processes. The education of the producer—that is, of the man who does the actual work of physical production —is closely connected with the amount of leisure available. Shorter hours and less strenuous work are necessary so that workers can profit from public expenditure on libraries, museums, and recreation, much of which goes to waste "because industry has trenched too much upon humanity" (pp. 51, 210). Though it is inconvenient at this point to consider sources and influences, the reader must not suppose that all of these ideas are original with Hobson or Ruskin. For instance, Robert Owen, in both his works and his factory practice, stressed the same points in the relation of education to the quantity and severity of labor. The education of the consumer is even more important to Hobson than that of the producer, for in its default the manufacturer is able to force the

producer, however enlightened he may be, to make goods containing great human cost and little if any human utility. The "educated individuality of consumers" (p. 76) is necessary to counteract this excessive control by the manufacturer, which perverts the art of consumption by fostering articles of illth[8] and by encouraging inferior though profitable produce lacking in true utility (p. 112). The concept illth, the direct opposite of wealth, is as important in Hobson's as it is in Ruskin's economy. Hobson says, for instance, that two nations might have the same population and national income and yet be "poles asunder in every true count of human prosperity" (p. 163). Finally, Hobson states, like Ruskin, that labor should not be "a dead commodity subject to the fluctuations of Supply and Demand in the market" but that it should receive regular pay on the basis of human need (p. 190).

Enough of Hobson's doctrine has been set down to show the kinship of Ruskin and Hobson. Before passing to Hobson's analysis of Ruskin's economy—which Mr. Curtin seems to accept in its entirety—it will be necessary to discuss Ruskin's fundamental terminology. For although Hobson's interpretation of Ruskin's doctrine is in the main sound and just, the serviceability of the interpretation is lessened because Hobson does not sufficiently illustrate his points from Ruskin's works. Thus while his book, *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* is indispensable in the reading of Ruskin's text, it is not in itself a sufficient exposition. One is often not sure what is Ruskin's thought and what is Hobson's amplification. Whether or not Hobson is considered Ruskin's disciple, by the time he published his study of Ruskin, Hobson had thoroughly

assimilated the fundamentals of Ruskin's economy and had elaborated his own economy on the basis of those fundamentals. At times in the argument of his book Hobson allows his own ideas to become fused with those of Ruskin, so that he gives Ruskin sometimes too much credit and sometimes too little. A consideration of Ruskin's main economic concepts at this point should obviate the confusion which results.

It will have been noticed, in several previous allusions to Ruskin's terminology, that much of the destructive criticism of orthodox economics is directed toward what Ruskin calls a misuse of common words. Likewise much of his constructive economy is concerned with redefining those words for his own purpose, or as he undoubtedly thought, with restoring their correct meanings. The first concept to be considered is "wealth." Ruskin quotes John Stuart Mill's statement, "To be wealthy is to have a large stock of useful articles," and comments, "I accept this definition. Only let us perfectly understand it." Then he inquires into the nature of possession and concludes that ". . . 'having' is not an absolute, but a gradated, power; and consists not only in the quantity or nature of the thing possessed, but also (and in a greater degree) in its suitableness to the person possessing it and in his vital power to use it." He then proceeds to his definition of "useful articles," or "utility." We observe here two of the aspects of Ruskinian wealth: an article of wealth must be useful, and the possessor must be endowed with what Ruskin calls acceptant capacity. "Wealth, therefore, is 'the possession of the valuable by the valiant'; and in considering it as a power existing in a nation, the two elements, the value of the thing, and the valour of its pos-

sessor, must be estimated together" (XVII, 87-89). Again he says ". . . wealth is not *only* intrinsic, but dependent, in order to become effectual, on a given degree of vital power in its possessor . . ." (p. 166). There is also a third aspect; an article cannot constitute wealth except under proper conditions of production: "It is impossible to conclude, of any given mass of acquired wealth, merely by the fact of its existence, whether it signifies good or evil to the nation in the midst of which it exists. Its real value depends on the moral sign attached to it, just as sternly as that of a mathematical quantity depends on the algebraical sign attached to it. Any given accumulation of commercial wealth may be indicative, on the one hand, of faithful industries, progressive energies, and productive ingenuities: or, on the other, it may be indicative of mortal luxury, merciless tyranny, ruinous chicane" (p. 52).

Ruskin's definition of wealth makes it clear that his "human economy," as before suggested, supplements the more conventional economy of his day. His claim is that his economy is more than supplementary, that without it a commercial economy is as purposeless as a house with neither foundation nor roof. In a former discussion the suggestion was also made that the interpretation and application of Adam Smith's political economy miscarried because of the later dissociation of that economy from its natural ethical background. Talcott Parsons makes the following significant remark in this regard: "For economic relations as conceived by the classical economics can take place on a significant scale only within a framework of order by virtue of which force and fraud are at least held within bounds and where the rights of others are

respected to a degree." [9] Even a strictly scientific economist of today would admit that economic measurement becomes a danger when its limitations are disregarded. But the thing which gives this problem its complexity—and therefore its historical realism—is the fact that the orthodox economists of Ruskin's day would have found no difficulty in admitting that fact either.

The second concept to be considered is "value." In the following characteristic passage Ruskin explains his general idea of the valuable: "Valor, from *valere,* to be well or strong . . . *in* life (if a man), or valiant; strong *for* life (if a thing), or valuable. To be 'valuable,' therefore, is to 'avail towards life.' A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable; in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant" (p. 84). Ruskin does not mean to define here two kinds of value, value in the man and value in the thing, but two aspects of the same conception. For he states that " 'Value' signifies the strength, or 'availing' of anything towards the sustaining of life, and is always twofold; that is to say, primarily, *intrinsic,* and secondarily, *effectual*" (p. 153). That is, intrinsic value in the thing requires completion by the "valiant" man before it can become effectual value.

It is well to keep both these points in mind. Hobson apparently does not give sufficient weight to Ruskin's statement of the reciprocal action of these two forces. In illustrating Ruskin's antipathy to evolutionary concepts Hobson says:

> His assertion of the eternity and immutability of value best exhibits this trait. "The value of a thing . . . is independent of opinion,

and of quantity. Think what you will of it, gain how much you may of it, the value of the thing itself is neither greater nor less. For ever it avails, or avails not; no estimate can ruin,[10] no disdain repress, the power which it holds from the Maker of things and of men."

Now here Mr. Ruskin comes very near to reviving one of the mediaeval superstitions about "substance" as an "entity." The value of a thing, what it avails for life, may, as we have seen, be independent of opinion, in the sense that a drunkard's high valuation of gin does not raise its essential value. But the value of a thing must vary with its quantity; the value of a glut of corn can at best be a potential not an actual value; where there is no hunger to satisfy, it cannot avail for life. (p. 115)

In the passage quoted by Hobson, Ruskin is emphasizing the intrinsic value of the "thing" which is "valuable." He has not, as Hobson says he has, lost sight of the "valiant" person who alone can render intrinsic value "effectual." Ruskin is just not speaking of the second aspect in that passage. Elsewhere he speaks of both aspects and does not seem to be emphasizing the eternity and immutability of value regardless of use by the right person. Consider, for instance, the following statement: "The production of effectual value, therefore, always involves two needs: first, the production of a thing essentially useful; then the production of the capacity to use it. Where the intrinsic value and acceptant capacity come together there is Effectual value, or wealth; where there is either no intrinsic value, or no acceptant capacity, there is no effectual value; that is to say, no wealth" (XVII, 154).

In refuting Ruskin, Hobson says also that value must vary with quantity and that there must be a need. Hobson is only taking Ruskin at his word when Ruskin says that value is independent of quantity. But here again it must be said that Ruskin is in that passage speaking only of intrinsic value and not of the acceptant capacity of the

person utilizing the unit of wealth. In other passages Ruskin insists not only that there must be a need but that the need must be suitable in quantity to individual capacity. For instance, on the subject of utility Ruskin says that ". . . possession is in use only, which for each man is sternly limited; so that such things, and so much of them as he can use, are, indeed, well for him, or Wealth; and more of them, or any other things, are ill for him, or Illth" (p. 168).

The habit of writing or speaking as if his public knew everything that he had already written or spoken is, together with his use of extravagant and cryptic rhetorical devices, responsible for many of the contradictions and inconsistencies laid at Ruskin's door. Of course, much of the contradictory element in Ruskin's writing arises from his sheer love of shock. It is a conversationalist's trick, or a lecturer's, like so many stylistic traits of the greatest Victorian essayists. Ruskin loves to get himself tangled up in a half-truth, a paradox, or a downright absurdity so that he can extricate himself deftly as if to say, "See, I was right after all." His works written as speeches abound in the more obvious examples of the method. For instance, he begins the second lecture of *The Crown of Wild Olive* as follows: "My good Yorkshire friends, you have asked me down here among your hills that I might talk to you about this Exchange you are going to build: but earnestly and seriously asking you to pardon me . . . I cannot speak, to purpose, of anything about which I do not care; and most simply and sorrowfully I have to tell you, at the outset, that I do *not* care about this Exchange of yours." Then, as a boxer will hit again before allowing time for recovery from the first blow, he says, "I do not

care about this Exchange—because *you* don't . . . ." After which he launches into his thesis—"All good architecture is the expression of national life and character"—and proves to them that he cares very much (XVIII, 433-434). The method in his essays is usually more subtle. In *Unto This Last,* for instance, he pretends to be assuring his well-to-do readers that his principles all tend to make them feel more secure, and then at the end of his sentence he surprises them by contradicting his professed meaning at the beginning: "And with respect to the mode in which these general principles affect the secure possession of property, so far am I from invalidating such security, that the whole gist of these papers will be found ultimately to aim at an extension in its range; and whereas it has long been known and declared that the poor have no right to the property of the rich, I wish it also to be known and declared that the rich have no right to the property of the poor" (XVII, 75). Much of the contradictory element in Ruskin's writings is also an exaggeration of the tendency of most brilliant writers to keep the sharp personality edges on their ideas and to utilize the suggestive power of contradiction where straightforward discourse would be inadequate for their purposes.

But back to Hobson for a moment. He does say in the passage under consideration that to Ruskin value is intrinsic and unchanged by circumstance. However, later on he takes for granted the requirement of capacity to use as one of Ruskin's tests of value, just as it is one of the main points of his own economy. In other words, the case against Hobson's interpretation here is not as clear as it may seem. One of the points of the discussion in the present chapter is that the commentary on Ruskin

by this noted economist should be used with great respect but with great care. After all, Hobson was almost as prolific a writer as Ruskin himself and may be expected to nod once in a while.

The third concept to be considered is "utility," which in Ruskin's works has the same meaning as "usefulness." Ruskin says, ". . . if a thing is to be useful, it must be not only of an availing nature, but in availing hands" (p. 88). Therefore, the first thing to notice about Ruskinian utility is that it is identical with Ruskinian value. He prefers to use the word "value" when he wishes to emphasize intrinsic value and the word "utility" or "usefulness" when he wishes to emphasize its use by the possessor of acceptant capacity. In Hobson's interpretation already considered, Ruskin was clearly stressing intrinsic value. In the following passage he is just as clearly stressing the acceptant capacity aspect: ". . . it depends on the person, much more than the article, whether its usefulness or abusefulness will be the quality developed in it" (p. 87).

Let us observe now the exact relationship between utility and wealth, for in the two following passages Ruskin might be thought to be using "usefulness" and "wealth" as synonymous terms also: ". . . usefulness is value in the hands of the valiant" (p. 88). "Wealth, therefore, is 'The Possession of the Valuable by the Valiant'" (*Idem*). Although the passages are similar, in the second one Ruskin is speaking elliptically. To repeat: " 'Value' signifies the strength, or availing of anything towards the sustaining of life, and is always twofold; that is to say, primarily *intrinsic* and secondarily, *effectual*" (p. 153). Thus if a good thing avails towards life in the consumption process, it is valuable, or useful. However,

a commodity might be intrinsically and effectually valuable without constituting Ruskinian wealth, for wealth has three moments whereas value has only two; wealth requires that a thing be good, that it be honestly got, that it be effectively used (XXVIII, 714); value requires only that a good thing be effectively used. Before we may designate a commodity wealth, according to Ruskin, we must ascertain the cost, which may under certain conditions negate the resultant value. "Value is the life-giving power of anything; cost, the quantity of labour required to produce it" (XVII, 153).

Though to amplify this argument here is to anticipate the discussion of cost, it seems profitable to do so. Wealth cannot be realized except as it is used by a person endowed with the capacity to use it properly. Traditional economics separates the production and consumption processes and considers separately the men functioning in each process. To Ruskin this separation is unwarranted, for the production process determines the nature of the consumer. If the production process is heavy with human cost, the majority of the people (that is, those who labor) do not possess acceptant capacity. In other words, Ruskinian value may exist in a product regardless of cost of production; Ruskinian wealth may not. A good suit of clothes on the back of a good man who needs it is a valuable, or useful, article; but it is not a unit of Ruskinian wealth if it has been produced by sweated labor.

The consumption aspect of utility needs further illustration from Ruskin's works. Though consumption was always theoretically the focal point of the science, Ruskin continually stresses its first and final importance in his own economy: ". . . the first of all inquiries respecting

the wealth of any nation is not, how much it has; but whether it is in a form that can be used, and in the possession of persons who can use it" (p. 161). "The final object of political economy, therefore, is to get a good method of consumption, and great quantity of consumption; in other words, to use everything, and to use it nobly . . ." (p. 102). As has already been noted, one of his main charges against the orthodox economists is what he considers their neglect of consumption: "Economists usually speak as if there were no good in consumption absolute. So far from this being so, consumption absolute is the end, crown, and perfection of production; and wise consumption is a far more difficult art than wise production" (p. 98).

However, "utility" also has great meaning for Ruskin when it is applied to the process of production itself—good work has utility: "Wise work is *useful* . . . . Yet do we ask ourselves, personally, or even nationally, whether our work is coming to anything or not? We don't care to keep what has been nobly done; still less do we care to do nobly what others would keep; and, least of all, to make the work itself useful, instead of deadly . . ." (XVIII, 426). Even the laborers themselves, he says, regard capital only as it affects their immediate interests, unmindful of the fact that "It matters little, ultimately, how much a labourer is paid for making anything; but it matters fearfully what the thing is, which he is compelled to make" (pp. 390-391).

In Ruskin's human economy, then, utility may exist in the product itself, in its consumption, and in the work embodied in its production. Utility in the production process is the life-giving element. And since the average

man spends most of his time working, the amount of utility in the work determines the kind of life he will lead. Again, it must be remembered, the kind of life he leads determines the kind of consumer he will be and the kind of product he will demand. Frantic work makes for frantic enjoyment, so that, as Ruskin says, working men on holiday in good times drink bucketfuls of port (p. 505), for "Intoxication is the only Heaven that, practically, Christian England displays to them" (XXVII, 542-543). This leads us to Ruskin's concept of cost, which in the production process is the opposite of utility.[11]

Ruskin, following Adam Smith, states that the " 'Cost' of anything is the quantity of labour necessary to obtain it," and he defines labor as "the Contest of the life of man with an opposite. Literally, it is the quantity of 'Lapse,' loss, or failure of human life, caused by any effort. It is usually confused with the effort itself . . . but there is much effort which is merely a mode of recreation . . . . labour is the *suffering* in effort. It is the negative quantity, or quantity of de-feat, which has to be counted against every Feat, or of de-fect, which has to be counted against every Fact, or Deed of men. In brief, it is 'that quantity of our toil which we die in' " (XVII, 182-183). Notice here that labor is the negative quantity which must be counted against a positive. This positive is utility. In the first place, the loss, or cost, is to be counted against consumption utility. If production cost outweighs consumption utility, the nation loses by the unit of commercial wealth produced, and this commercial wealth then becomes illth. In the second place, the cost of the work is to be counted against the utility of the work itself, for, as Ruskin says, "nearly all" labor can be "divided into positive and nega-

tive labour: positive, that which produces life; negative, that which produces death." In the term "life" he includes man's "intellect, soul, and physical power," and he says further that "Labour is of a higher or lower order, as it includes more or fewer of the elements of life: and labour of good quality, in any kind, includes always as much intellect and feeling as will fully and harmoniously regulate the physical force" (pp. 94-97).

Keeping in mind the conclusions with regard to cost and utility in the production process, let us consider the distinction he makes between labor and work: "Cost is measured and measurable (using the accurate Latin terms) only in 'labor,' not in 'opera.' It does not matter how much *work* a thing needs to produce it; it matters only how much *distress* . . . so that the noblest works of man cost less than the meanest" (pp. 183-184). Since Ruskin emphasizes the encouragement of types of labor which utilize more and more of the intellectual, life-giving elements, he apparently means here that labor should become more *opera* and less *labor*. Industrial production might approach, then, production in the fine arts, embodying a maximum of *opera* and a minimum of *labor,* or virtually total utility and virtually no cost from the human standpoint. Does this mean that Ruskin envisages the elimination of labor as he defines it? No, he says, labor is necessary to right living (p. 396). But the deadly quality of labor may be reduced by means of "a determined sacrifice of such convenience, or beauty, or cheapness as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman; and by equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour" (X, 196).

This completes the discussion of the concepts on which

Ruskin bases his economic theory. His treatment of other terms familiar in ordinary economic writings will be taken up later in controversial setting. We are now ready to consider Hobson's analysis of Ruskin's constructive economy. Ruskin has seldom been given credit for his social theory, says Hobson, not only because it is scattered through several books and cannot be seen as a whole but also because it is incomplete.[12] This is true, and one of the purposes of the present chapter is to determine just what Hobson adds in his systematization of Ruskin's theory. He first quotes Ruskin's statement in the first chapter of *Munera Pulveris:* ". . . the essential work of the political economist is to determine what are in reality useful or life-giving things, and by what degrees and kinds of labour they are attainable and distributable" (XVII, 152). In this sentence, says Hobson, Ruskin lays down "with admirable succinctness the fundamental antithesis between the cost of labour which goes into making 'goods,' and the utility or enjoyment to be got out of them" (p. 106).

This antithesis, or the balancing of utility against cost, in the reckoning of wealth is to Hobson the chief contribution that Ruskin makes to social theory. It will be best here to set down Hobson's outline of Ruskin's utility-cost antithesis and then to consider Hobson's exposition. Before we can reduce commercial utilities to Ruskinian utilities, Hobson says, we must ask three questions: (1) What good human purposes can the units of commercial wealth serve? (2) What kinds of persons will get them? (3) How much will each person get? To balance this analysis of utility with the analysis of cost, we must know (1) the intrinsic nature of the work in relation to the

workers, (2) the capacity of the workers, (3) the distribution of the work (pp. 110-112).

This outline of Ruskin's theory is similar to Hobson's outline of his own theory, which we have already considered. The similarity is significant, for here Hobson, sixteen years before the publication of *Work and Wealth,* formulates the nucleus of his own theory. It is quite possible that Ruskin aided him in that formulation. The important point here, however, is that Ruskin's theory is not as fragmentary as Hobson says it is. Let us observe Hobson's discussion of the utility-cost analysis:

> In his broad declaration, "There is no wealth but life," as in his unceasing stress upon the need of good work for all men, Mr. Ruskin has laid down as the foundation-stone of social theory the organic relation between work and life, between production and consumption. It was therefore to be expected that in "Munera Pulveris" "wealth" would be resolved into both its human constituents, human cost receiving the same attention as human utility, and that the laws of the natural and moral interaction between work and life would be expounded. A logical analysis of Ruskinian wealth would take the concrete forms which constituted "commercial wealth," and, after ascertaining how much cost of painful or injurious effort went with the making of each of them, how much vital use would be got out of each of them by the consumer into whose hands it passed by distribution, would rate the true "wealth" embodied in these forms by the surplus of utility over cost. Such analysis is suggested, but is only partially applied in "Munera Pulveris." The defective treatment is due to an acceptance of a narrower meaning of wealth, which, by making it consist in "things in themselves valuable," eliminates direct regard for labor-cost, and throws an undue stress upon utility. (pp. 106-107)

Ruskin, however, does not in *Munera Pulveris* make wealth consist of "things in themselves valuable"; he always means that intrinsic value must become "effectual" before it constitutes wealth. For instance, he says, ". . . for every atom of intrinsic value produced he must with

exactest chemistry produce its twin atom of acceptant digestion, or understanding capacity; or in the degree of his failure, he has no wealth" (XVII, 167). Since this apparent error has already been dealt with in a former discussion, let us pass to the second item which, Hobson says, is responsible for the "defective treatment" in *Munera Pulveris,* the elimination of direct regard for labor cost.

As already noted, Hobson gives Ruskin credit for stating at the beginning of *Munera Pulveris* "with admirable succinctness" the fundamental antithesis of utility and cost. In the discussion of Ruskin's cost concept it has also been noted that *Munera Pulveris* furnishes the clearest statement of the way in which cost must be "counted against" utility in the computation of wealth. Also it is demonstrable that Ruskin keeps his utility-cost antithesis in mind throughout *Munera Pulveris.* Ruskin's development of that antithesis is not, of course, as ordered and intelligible as is Hobson's development in *Work and Wealth.* Ruskin's method is indirect, Hobson's direct. Hobson says that "Such analysis is suggested, but is only partially applied in 'Munera Pulveris.'" He does not indicate what omissions he refers to when he says the analysis is only partially applied; but since he admires the succinctness of Ruskin's initial statement of the utility-cost antithesis, he seems to mean that somewhere among the linguistic and literary digressions which form so large a part of *Munera Pulveris* Ruskin loses sight of cost and thus overemphasizes utility. Therefore, the best way to refute Hobson is to begin at the first of *Munera Pulveris* and to show that Ruskin remains aware of the importance of the cost element throughout.

Assuming with Hobson that Ruskin clearly intends at

the beginning of *Munera Pulveris* that positive utility should be balanced against negative cost in the measurement of wealth, let us apply that utility-cost schema to typical statements as we turn through the pages of *Munera Pulveris.* Ruskin says, "If he produce or make good and beautiful things, they will Re-Create him; . . . if bad and ugly things, they will 'corrupt' or 'break in pieces'—that is, in the exact degree of their power, Kill him" (XVII, 151). In other words, in the production of good and beautiful things the work itself tends to contain more utility, less cost. Also good and beautiful things contain so much utility in the consumption process that whatever cost exists is outweighed. On the other hand, in the production of bad or ugly things not only is the cost apt to be great but also, since there is no utility in the consumption process, cost stands unbalanced and absolute. Again Ruskin says, "Value is the life-giving power of anything, cost, the quantity of labour required to produce it . . ." (p. 153). Since value and utility are to Ruskin the same concept, here Ruskin means to balance cost against utility.

Much of *Munera Pulveris* is concerned with the production and consumption of articles of luxury. On this type of production Ruskin makes the following statement: ". . . the production of any article not intrinsically (nor in the process of manufacture) injurious, is useful, if the desire of it causes productive labour in other directions" (p. 177). An indifferent or foolish article—a harmless luxury, for instance—may be useful if its cost of production does not tip the scale to the negative side.

In the following statement Ruskin clearly points to the three branches of his inquiry: intrinsic value, cost of pro-

duction, and acceptant capacity. "Thus then, finally, the nature of the store has to be considered under two main lights; the one, that of its immediate and actual utility; the other, that of the past national character which it signifies by its production, and future character which it must develop by its use" (p. 178). In other words: (1) What is the intrinsic value, or utility, of the articles in the national store? (2) How was the national character affected by the production of the articles? If cost predominated in the production process, national wealth decreases; if utility predominated in the production process, national wealth increases. (3) What national character will result from the use of the articles in the national store?

The amenities of high civilization have utility, says Ruskin, but the cost of their maintenance must not be forgotten: "Servants, and artists, and splendour of habitation and retinue, have all their use, propriety, and office. But I am determined that the reader shall understand clearly what they cost; and see that the conditions of having them is the subjection to us of a certain number of imprudent or unfortunate persons . . . over whose destinies we exercise a boundless control" (p. 268).

Finally, Ruskin instructs employers of labor to look beyond mere employment, which is no benefit in itself. They must first be sure of utility of product, and then they must have an eye for the reduction of the human cost of labor: "You must employ him first to produce useful things; secondly, of the several (suppose equally useful) things he can equally well produce, you must set him to make that which will cause him to lead the healthiest life . . ." (p 275).

It seems obvious, then, that whatever realization Rus-

kin has of the utility-cost antithesis at the beginning of *Munera Pulveris* he keeps until the end of that book, and that the following statement of Hobson gives a false view of the theoretical development in *Munera Pulveris:* "He opens with a clear and logical distinction between value and cost . . . but instead of rating the 'wealth' contained in goods equally by the lowness of their cost and the height of their value, he looks to the latter only for his standard measure. This gives a one-sided character to his analysis—the value or 'utility' side is worked out with admirable skill, but the 'cost' side is slighted, while the organic relation between the two is left out of sight" (p. 107).

Returning now to Hobson's threefold analysis of Ruskinian utility, we should pass over the first two questions as already sufficiently considered, and center on the third, for Hobson's treatment apparently requires further qualification at that point. This third test of wealth—that is, what quantity of the commercial utilities will each person get?—is not, according to Hobson, "explicitly applied" but "follows as a corollary from the requirement of 'capacity.' " So Hobson proceeds to show the lines which the argument on this point should have followed if Ruskin had applied it:

> The amount of utility got out of anything will depend, not only upon its intrinsic quality and the nature of the person who possesses it, but also upon the quantity of it which he possesses. A loaf has intrinsic value; it has effectual value to a worthy man, but only in so far as he has not already sufficient bread. In other words, the greatest effectual utility is got from any article when it goes to satisfy the intensest human need. We must look, therefore, not only to the nature of the thing and the nature of the consumer in order to know the "wealth" that attaches to any goods, but also to their distribution. A given quantity of commercial goods will attain their

maximum value according as they are distributed so as to satisfy the greatest needs. (p. 110)

All this would be true enough as an explanation of Ruskin's intent in *Munera Pulveris*. But since Hobson clearly intends the "quantity" clause as a supplement, as an explanation of what Ruskin *should* have done, he is arguing beside the question. Hobson says that utility depends upon quantity possessed as well as upon intrinsic quality and acceptant capacity. Ruskin says: ". . . possession is in use only, which for each man is sternly limited; so that such things, and so much of them as he can use, are, indeed, well for him, or Wealth; and more of them, or any other things, are ill for him, or Illth" (XVII, 168).

Hobson says that we must look to the distribution of goods as well as to their nature and to the nature of the consumer. Ruskin's outline of his inquiry in *Munera Pulveris* gives distribution just the place that Hobson says it should occupy:

"The first inquiry resolves itself into three heads:

(1) What is the nature of the store?

(2) What is the quantity in relation to the population?

(3) What is the quantity in relation to the currency?

The second inquiry into two:

(1) Who are the Holders of the store, and in what proportions?

(2) Who are the Claimants of the store (that is to say, the holders of the currency), and in what proportions?" (p. 174)

It is evident that the second subheads in both inquiries involve distribution.

Again, Hobson says that a quantity of goods attains maximum value when distributed according to greatest need. The following passage of Ruskin obviously covers the same ground: "What quantity of each article composing the store exists in proportion to the real need for it by the population?" (p. 178). When Hobson states, as mentioned above, that this third test of wealth is not explicitly applied, he appends a note, "Though implied in 'Munera Pulveris,' ##56, 57." Why should Hobson single out two paragraphs which are only slightly relevant to the point under discussion and say that the quantity-distribution subject is only implied, when Ruskin elsewhere explicitly makes it one of his main points?

It may be thought that if such errors of statement can be found in Hobson's exposition, Hobson cannot be an informed critic, nor can his book be as serviceable as I have said it is. However, Hobson's book is indispensable to students of Ruskin because Hobson understands Ruskin's type of social economy, not because he has given an accurate and exhaustive critique of Ruskin's *works*.

Let us continue Hobson's explanation of his outline of Ruskin's utility-cost balance, considering now the cost side. Hobson says, ". . . . the full and lucid analysis of utility is balanced by no corresponding analysis of cost in 'Munera Pulveris.' For the economics of work we must turn to an earlier book, 'The Political Economy of Art,' and even there we do not find any orderly treatment of the whole scope of human work, but only a just consideration of the work side of the problem in art-production" (pp. 110-111). Of course, *Munera Pulveris* contains more of the analysis of the cost concept than Hobson says it does, and that analysis supplements the treatment in *The*

Political Economy of Art, a treatment which is inadequate, as Hobson says. There are some passages in *The Political Economy of Art,* however, which permit of application to general industrial work. Of the balance of utility and cost in the production of luxury Ruskin says that a nation should not indulge in luxuries "if the temptation consequent on their possession, or fatality incident to their manufacture, more than counterbalances the good done by the effort to obtain them" (XVI, 125). Much of the same kind of argument is directed to those whom Carlyle called captains of industry and Ruskin pilots of the state. They can say to their laborers, "Subdue this obstacle that has baffled our fathers, put away this plague that consumes our children . . . ," or they can say, "Here am I; this power is mine; come, build a mound here for me to be throned upon . . ." (p. 102), and so forth. Similar is a passage in which he says that a man should administer his wealth "for the profit of all, directing each man to the labour that is most healthy for him, and most serviceable for the community" (p. 129), in other words, to labor that contains low cost and high utility. Since to Ruskin cost means labor-cost, the utility-cost idea is also expressed when he says, ". . . jewels, liveries, and other such common belongings of wealthy people, certainly convey no pleasure to their owners proportionate to their cost" (p. 132).

Of the first item in Hobson's cost outline—the intrinsic nature of the work in relation to the workers—Hobson says, "Labour that is toilsome, monotonous, carried on amid ugly and noxious surroundings, uninteresting, and uneducative, involves 'cost' " (p. 111). The line is so close here that it is impossible to tell just how much of

the long passage from which this is taken Hobson intends as an addition to Ruskin's thought. And anyway the point need not be labored, once the reader has been alerted to the possible ambiguity in all such instances. Hobson believes his Ruskinian doctrine so thoroughly and is so intent on demonstrating its truth that possibly he does not know—or care for that matter—where the line should be drawn. At any rate, Ruskin has many passages similar to Hobson's explanation. For instance, he says in *Munera Pulveris,* "Money may sometimes be accumulated at the cost of life, or by limitations of it . . ." (XVII, 149).

On the second item—the capacity of the workers—Hobson says that a normal day's labor by strong men who are trained may involve little cost, but "imposed on weaker women or children, its cost may be enormous" (p. 111). Ruskin says, "We buy our liveries, and gild our prayer-books, with pilfered pence out of children's and sick men's wages, and thus ingeniously dispose a given quantity of Theft, so that it may produce the largest possible measure of delicately-distributed suffering" (XVI, 402).

On the third item—the distribution of the work—Hobson remarks that we must know whether a given amount of labor is reasonably distributed in regard to time, intensity, and number of persons or whether it is "inflicted in heavy and protracted toil upon a small number driven to put out an excessive exertion" (p. 112). Ruskin covers the same ground when he says, ". . . as some labour is more destructive of life than other labour, the hour of day of the more destructive toil is supposed to include proportionate rest." He also says that cost "varies with the quantity of the thing wanted and with the number or persons who work for it" (XVII, 184-185).

This completes the presentation of Hobson's utility-cost analysis. Though the details of his commentary leave much to be desired, no economist has gone as far as Hobson in attempting to justify Ruskin's position in the history of economic theory. Of the analysis which we have been considering Hobson says: ". . . had Mr. Ruskin in 'Munera Pulveris' or elsewhere plainly and orderly set forth these principles of the subjective political economy, their strictly scientific character could not have evaded recognition" (p. 113).

Chapter V

UNTO THIS LAST

Unto This Last derives its striking quality from its attack on current political economy. Therefore it has usually been considered mainly destructive, a pulling down of the orthodox structure so that Ruskin might build his own in *Munera Pulveris, Time and Tide,* and *Fors Clavigera.* For instance, Ely remarks, incidentally failing to mention *Munera Pulveris,* Ruskin's most important constructive work: " 'Unto This Last' is the chief economic work of a destructive character which Ruskin wrote, as 'Fors Clavigera' and 'Time and Tide' are his greatest constructive productions within the field of social economics." [1] Such might have been Ruskin's intention, but the scheme was unsuccessful if, as many believe, Ruskin accuses orthodox economists falsely. That is, if *Unto This Last* is essentially destructive, it essentially fails. And since it is Ruskin's masterpiece among his social studies, a sympathetic student would scarcely admit it to be a failure. It may with justification be treated as one of the constructive series; its classification as a destructive document has obscured the fact that it contains in nucleus all the constructive ideas which Ruskin later developed in detail.

The account of the reception of *Unto This Last* which is given by Cook and Wedderburn (XVII, xxvii-xxx) is misleading in that it assumes that if journalists and economists were violent in their abuse of Ruskin, they must

have been so because Ruskin opposed the established creed. But the evidence seems to show that the best informed of Ruskin's critics objected to *Unto This Last* because of what they considered its ignorant or malignant misrepresentation, not merely because of its opposition to the established creed. In the discussion of the present chapter Ruskin will probably appear as a quibbler when he takes issue with Mill. Whether he is so from malice or misinformation is not always easy to decide.

From the constructive standpoint each of the four essays of *Unto This Last* contains a main idea. The first essay, "The Roots of Honor," is a plea for the professionalization of industry. The second, "The Veins of Wealth," is a preliminary statement of the thesis that the end of wealth is man, or in Ruskin's words the production of happy hearted creatures with souls of good quality. The third, "Qui Judicatis Terram," contains the most formal statement of one of the master motifs of the four essays, that justice is the only rule which can be applied to social operations. The fourth and most important, "Ad Valorem," is a discussion of the fundamental terms to be used in Ruskin's political economy, together with the thesis of the second essay in its final form, "There is no wealth but life." Each of these essays could with advantage be discussed in detail from the constructive standpoint. If that were done, one should of course emphasize the fact that the essays are not distinct in any real sense. In fact, a better procedure might be to consider the whole group as a development of the two master motifs, justice and wealth. In any case, one should then need to discuss the essays from the destructive standpoint, and there would still be points that would not fit nicely into such a scheme.

It will probably prove more informative to take up subjects concerned with Ruskin's economy in the order in which they occur in the text of *Unto This Last,* passing over those parts which have been examined sufficiently in the preceding chapters. With this informal order of topics it will be possible to discuss freely and to point out similarities between Ruskin's thought and that of other writers. This order may also make the material more useful to some future editor of *Unto This Last,* at a time when Ruskin's social thought will be seriously studied by social scientists and historians of ideas.

Though the preface did not appear until *Unto This Last* was published in 1862 as a book, two years after the essays themselves came out in *Cornhill Magazine* and in *Harper's New Monthy Magazine,* that seems the appropriate place to begin. In the first passage of interest here Ruskin says that the chief aim of his book is to give a logical definition of wealth and that he bases his definition on the authority of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and Horace (XVII, 18). *Munera Pulveris* begins in the same way; there he arraigns political economists for not utilizing the thoughts of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and Bacon on the subject. Orthodox economists could answer, of course, "But we have expressly stated that political economy as we understand it began with Adam Smith." Cairnes says that the economic arrangements of Greek, Roman, or feudal life were so different from those of modern life that "had Political Economy been cultivated" in those times, it would "doubtless have contained some expositions which we do not find in it" but that it would also "have wanted many which it now contains." [2] Since Ruskin ordinarily bolsters his social theory in this manner,

it should be pointed out that the value of such authority when adduced to support word usages seems to be illusory. For only hopeless confusion results when intervening cultural change is disregarded. James Bonar, author of one of the wisest books in the history of ideas, says that though a social or political theory "may be generically the same as one a thousand years older, there is seldom more than a generic resemblance." [3] We saw in the instance of *laissez-faire* how societal change in a single generation apparently caused a violation of the spirit of its original advocacy. An instructive contrast to Ruskin's passage occurs in an economic treatise which appeared three years before *Unto This Last*. H. D. Macleod (1827-1902) states that "Ancient writers unanimously held that Exchangeability . . . is the sole essence and principle of Wealth . . . ." [4] Only the vigilant fail to find what they seek!

Immediately after acclaiming the understanding of the ancients on the subject of wealth Ruskin launches his attack on Mill. The most reputed treatment of the subject in modern times, Ruskin says, begins with the statement "writers on political economy profess to teach, or to investigate,* the nature of wealth," and continues as follows: "everyone has a notion, sufficiently correct for common purposes, of what is meant by wealth. . . . It is no part of the design of this treatise to aim at metaphysical nicety of definition." [5] Ruskin comments, with the glee he always shows when he can badger Mill, "Metaphysical nicety, we assuredly do not need; but physical nicety, and logical accuracy, with respect to a physical subject, we as assuredly do" (pp. 18-19). This passage is significant because it shows Ruskin's tendency to become more per-

sonal in his attack on the orthodox economists as he progressed with his economic writings. The preface, being later than the essays, shows him in full tilt against Mill. In the first three essays Ruskin names Mill only once, and the mention is accompanied with a respectful bow (p. 67). But in the fourth essay, after he had been attacked in newspapers and magazines and after he had been notified by Thackeray that no more essays could be accepted by the *Cornhill,* we see him coming to closer grips with those whom he designated opponents. The violent critical abuse of the essays seems to have sent him to burrow into Mill's and Ricardo's works for retaliative ammunition. Ruskin apparently relishes his comment on Mill since he repeats it in his preface to *Munera Pulveris* in 1872. As he did not use it in "Ad Valorem," where he first becomes sharp with Mill, one may wonder if he saw in the meantime a censure on the same passage by Macleod, who says that since Mill is a writer on logic, we should expect "the strictest logical accuracy in the use of fundamental conceptions, especially in such a one as the word Wealth." [6] Both Ruskin and Macleod apparently overlook the fact that Mill does not accept the popular definition as his own. He does state that everyone's notion of wealth is sufficient for common purposes, but so far is he from admitting that his own (however wrong it might be thought to be) and common purposes coincide that he adds three thousand words in explanation of his meaning.

The first purpose of *Unto This Last* having been to give a right definition of wealth, the second, says Ruskin, was to show that wealth is attainable only if society has reached a sufficiently high moral level. He then strikes

again at the economists. "Honesty is not a disturbing force, which deranges the orbits of economy; but a consistent and commanding force . . ." (p. 19). No economist ever said that honesty is a disturbing force. Honesty and rationality are premises of economics, and many critics believe that these two premises are responsible for the fundamental unreality of economics as a science. The point should be expanded somewhat, for much of Ruskin's criticism is directed at this concept of disturbing force. Note first that orthodox economists of Ruskin's day—and some of them still—formulate their hypotheses separately. In other words, one phenomenon results from another supposing the inertia of other forces, *ceteris paribus,* or in the absence of disturbing forces—all of which modifying phrases mean the same thing. Mill's general exposition may be instanced. After showing that it is impossible "to insulate any particular social phenomenon, and investigate its laws without disturbance from the rest," he states that all general propositions of the science are strictly hypothetical. They are based on a "supposititious set of circumstances, and declare how some given cause would operate in those circumstances, supposing that no others were combined with them." [7] Though Ruskin seems to be wrong about honesty as a disturbing force, his case is stronger against the general method used by economists who manipulate their data after the manner of physical scientists. Cliffe-Leslie says that if economists can disregard as disturbing causes everything that prevents the pursuit of gain from acting freely and can then theorize about wages and prices in a vacuum, they have no right "to assume the existence of the love of gain itself in such an imaginary world." And even if they assume its existence,

he says, it is as complex in its action and effect on production and distribution as are the desires of different individuals.[8] Most modern thought on the subject agrees with Cliffe-Leslie—and Ruskin.

And yet one must be careful to understand what such an agreement involves. Most present-day economists construct simplified models to illustrate principles. For instance, they develop the action of capital, one factor of production, supposing labor constant and unaffected by that action. Or they trace the action of demand in conjunction with totally inelastic supply, and then attempt to attain greater and greater market realism by bringing in more of the normal functions. This is exactly what nineteenth-century orthodox economists tried to do. If modern economists think they failed—and they do—it is not chiefly because of their hypothetical method but because orthodox economists did not know the actual nature of economic factors and forces. It must be noted also that there is a great difference between using the hypothetical, or fictional, method for expository purposes and using it as a working method, and the latter practice forms the basis of much of the criticism directed at the older economists. And it would be more comfortable to leave the matter so, but the truth seems to be, as suggested above, that modern economists also use the fictional method and then apply it to actual conditions. Let us consider the matter more specifically for a moment as it appears in one of the better modern textbooks.[9] The authors say that "If we vary slightly the amount of one factor A whilst holding the other amount (s) of the other (s) constant, we can calculate the marginal (net) physical (and hence marginal (net) revenue) product of

factor A in any given situation." Again they say, ". . . if we vary its employment by a small amount, holding the amount of other factors constant, and find the resultant addition to the revenue of a firm, we shall have discovered its marginal (net) revenue productivity." This means that such productivity can be calculated by imagining a condition in which certain factors could be held constant—and there are actual conditions where some of the factors are constant—figuring up what it would be, and then applying results by analogy to the actual circumstances, which apparently is similar to calculating the speed of fall of an object in a necessarily hypothetical vacuum. So we seem to be back again in the nineteenth century when political economists compared their science with physics, unless somehow by means of Pareto's indifference curves or Keynes's liquidity preferences economists have been able to approximate more closely the real world. I believe that they have, but it is intriguing to surmise what another Ruskin would find underneath some tangle of differential equations.

After Ruskin makes his statement about honesty as a disturbing force he continues in the same vein, this time taking Adam Smith for his opponent. Now Ruskin seems to remember more of *The Wealth of Nations* than he is conscious of, and many of his ideas, even the phrasing of them at times, emphasize the fact. But he has thoroughly assimilated much of the best spirit of Smith and has therefore forgotten his source. He remembers what he considers the worst, and that usually out of context. So he goes back and puts his finger on it, now that he needs "passages" to support his argument. Ruskin is still on the subject of honesty, and he says that we must recover our

lost sense of it, assuring ourselves (and here he paraphrases *The Wealth of Nations,* Bk. I, Ch. 10) "that there are yet in the world men who can be restrained from fraud otherwise than by fear of losing employment" (p. 20). In his note to the passage Ruskin remarks on the "entirely damned" soul of any creature who could write such a thing. This indicates his general opinion of Adam Smith, whom he calls elsewhere a "half-bred and half-witted Scotchman" (XXVII, 516). In the passage which Ruskin paraphrases and then quotes, Smith says that the discipline of the customer is a more important restraining influence than that of the corporation (union). The statement Ruskin objects to is an inconsequential part of Smith's argument on the evils of workmen's corporations, which had served legitimate purposes in times past but which in his own times, Smith thought, enabled town workmen to bleed a predominant agricultural population. As usual, Smith's sympathy here is with the agricultural laborer. He is also arguing that the corporations worked injustice upon conscientious artisans. Another of his arguments is that corporations of artisans enable unscrupulous governments to tax easily and severely. So we get the picture of an idealist advocating freedom for workmen who are caught between the forces exerted by a decadent guild system on the one hand and by avaricious government officials on the other, and we get entirely different implications from the passage than those Ruskin gets by wrenching it from its context.

The reader needs no assurance at this stage of the discussion that such attempts to point out flaws in Ruskin's argument do not place me on the side of those commentators who believe that he did not understand political

economy and should not have written about it. On the contrary, it is obvious from my discussion that I think Ruskin right in many respects. He was always far too right to have prevailed so little. And much of the antagonism was always due to his method of controversy rather than to his ideas. It is human nature to love to show oneself right and others wrong, but Ruskin was equipped with this pugnacity to an abnormal degree. It might be said to have furnished the motive power of his whole literary output. He began *Modern Painters* because he thought everybody else was wrong about Turner. His geological studies took issue with nearly all the accepted doctrines. In biology he always fiercely contended against the trend toward evolution. At the end of his life when he was taking his correspondence course in elementary physics from Sir Oliver Lodge and writing to Sir Oliver those acutely discerning letters which were at the same time full of respect and humility, he confesses that if he had been wiser and less contentious in his attitude, he would not be so "wearily ashamed" of what he had done. ". . . how differently I might have succeeded," he exclaims, "if I had but, in meekness and patience, tried to persuade men . . ." (XXXVII, 542).

"The Roots of Honour," the first essay of *Unto This Last,* opens up in the first sentence the whole problem of the purpose and method of orthodox political economy: "Among the delusions which at different periods have possessed themselves of the minds of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious—certainly the least creditable—is the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy, based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of

the influence of social affection" (XVII, 25). This is stylistically one of Ruskin's favorite beginnings. Later on in *Unto This Last* he begins, "The most curious error in Mr. Mill's entire work is his . . . assertion that a demand for commodities is not a demand for labour" (p. 102). Again, he says, "In all the ranges of human thought I know of none so melancholy as the speculations of political economists on the population question" (p. 106). There must be hundreds of such sentences in Ruskin's works as he attacks problem after problem, and they set the tone for each new treatment. "Come let us muse together on this amazing instance of stupidity," he seems to say.

It should be evident from former discussions that the orthodox economists contemporary with Ruskin do not base their science on the exclusive efficacy of the motives which they choose to study, as Ruskin says they do in the passage under consideration. They take especial pains to show that they are abstracting from the motivating manifold in any social phenomenon. They say that there are other and more important motives to study but that as economists they are studying only the economic motives. We have seen that Ruskin was not satisfied with the narrow bounds of political economy as it was conceived by his orthodox contemporaries, that his conception of the science was sociological and ethical rather than strictly economic. As far as the problems themselves go, he was in striking accord with Mill on the subject. Even if the extraneous considerations in a problem were insignificant, says Mill, it would still be desirable to make deductions from all the laws of nature concerned, not from some of them. But in studying "phenomena of society," such total contemplation is particularly important for "There is no

social phenomenon which is not more or less influenced by every other part of the condition of the same society." [10] But still for Mill there is within the general field of social science another science which he calls political economy. Comte and Ruskin are at one in this criticism of the restricted nature of political economy, and Mill had already answered Comte's charge before Ruskin's was published.[11] He was wise not to try to answer Ruskin, who challenged him in print on various points several times. For Ruskin would undoubtedly have made a fool of him, even if he had to call himself one to do it, which was in fact one of his favorite techniques (XXVII, 66). J. M. Robertson, an exceedingly sympathetic commentator on Ruskin, says that the first sentence of *Unto This Last* is "worse than reckless," that it is "explicit calumny," and that "economists never professed to reach an advantageous 'code of social action,' but only to set forth the laws or tendencies of normal commerce." [12] Robertson seems to be right in the matter, but the reader will understand that the nature of the dilemmic premises will not permit unqualified choice.

Then we come to Ruskin's brilliant treatment of the economic man concept. Orthodox political economy is like a science of gymnastics based on the assumption that bodies have no bones in them, that we could roll them up "into pellets, flatten them into cakes, or stretch them into cables." But he likes the idea of bones better because of the connotations, so his imagination leaps to the other extreme of motion. It is more like a science that assumes man all skeleton, ". . . and having shown the utmost that may be made of bones, and constructed a number of geometrical figures with death's head and humeri, suc-

cessfully proves the inconvenience of the reappearance of soul among these corpuscular structures" (p. 26). Many economists attack the economic man idea. Two years before the publication of *Unto This Last* the American economist H. C. Carey published a book in which Ruskin could have found nearly all of his indictment of orthodox English economists. Political economy has "made for itself a being which it denominated man," says Carey, and has "excluded all those parts of the ordinary man that were common to him and the angel—retaining carefully all those common to him and the beast of the forest." [13] Toynbee's picture, though totally different from Ruskin's, invites comparison because of its poetic intensity. The world in which these creatures live—"gold-seeking animals, stripped of every human affection, for ever digging, weaving, spinning, watching with keen undeceived eyes each other's movements, passing incessantly and easily from place to place in search of gain, all alert, crafty, mobile"—"was laid as a mask over the living world, and hid its face." [14] But for imaginative power I know of only one treatment of the economic man concept that approaches Ruskin's—by another renegade, although a professional—that of Thorstein Veblen: "Self-imposed in elemental space, he spins symmetrically about his own spiritual axis until the parallelogram of forces bears down upon him, whereat he follows the line of the resultant. When the force of the impact is spent, he comes to rest, a self-contained globule of desire as before." [15]

In fact, Veblen reminds one of Ruskin again and again, an amazing circumstance in itself since there never were two writers more different in general approach and the apparent sources of their thought. Of course, if two writ-

ers, diametrically opposite in nature still feel the necessity of the same ideas, the plausibility of those ideas may thereby be enhanced in some minds. John S. Gambs has an excellent treatment of the point of view of the American institutional economists and of Veblen as the founder of that school. The following Ruskinian points are especially pertinent: first, they deny that the economic system operates automatically and insist that economic disorganization forces the "consideration of welfare and illfare"; second, money is not a mere medium of exchange but is besides "a weapon of attenuated economic coercion"; third, the distinction is necessary between industrial and pecuniary employments, for the purpose of the one is to make goods and supply services "of direct social benefit," and of the other, to make money.[16] Veblen himself says that classical theory—and for him marginal theory comes under the same indictment—assumes a human nature that is "simple and constant in its reactions to pecuniary stimulus," and since this reaction is the only one "legitimately present," those theories overlook or eliminate the man who does the valuing. His statement that the industrial system and the conventional science that studies it foster production for profit rather than for welfare is similar to Ruskin's charge of production for profit regardless of human cost.[17] The general idea runs through Veblen's books such as *The Theory of Business Enterprise, The Engineers and the Price System, Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise:* the engineers are ready to bring in an age of plenty, but the "captains of industry" (he gets the name from Carlyle but ironizes it characteristically) "sabotage" such efforts because profit more often than not requires relative scarcity.

Next we shall consider one of Ruskin's passages on employer-employee relations, where he illustrates his points by domestic service, his usual device. He states that "the greatest average of work" cannot be attained on the basis of self-interest and the cash-nexus but will result only from justice and mutual affection (pp. 27-31). Ruskin's use of household economy in this manner shows his emphasis on political economy as an art rather than as a science. This was a common mode—in fact the traditional mode—of regarding the subject, although, as we have seen, the orthodox school attempted to repudiate this meaning. Mrs. Marcet's *Conversations* is an interesting example of the popular treatment. A "lady" has asked a "philosopher" to define political economy. "Madam, replied he, you understand perfectly what is meant by *household economy;* you need only extend your idea of the economy of a family to that of a whole people—of a nation, and you will have some comprehension of the nature of political economy." [18] One naturally wonders how many of Ruskin's ideas on the conventional science came from such simplified treatises as Mrs. Marcet's. Much of the popular misunderstanding of political economy in the early nineteenth century must have been due to presentations by people who were either ignorant or overenthusiastic. In his *History of Economic Doctrines* Gide is amused to find the following information in the letters of Maria Edgeworth: ". . . political economy was so much the fashion that distinguished ladies before engaging a governess for their children inquired about her competence to teach political economy" (p. 119). Harriet Martineau, in the class of the overenthusiastic of course, implies a perfection of doctrine in her masters which is expressed by none of

the economists themselves. In introducing her extremely popular *Illustrations* she says that formality was necessary in the early science in order to arrive at truth, and adds, "This is a very hopeful state of things, however: for when truth is once laid hold of, it is easy to discover and display its beauty; and this, the last and easiest process, is what remains to be done for Political Economy." [19] There is no evidence that Ruskin read these oversimplified treatises; it is sufficient that almost everybody else did.

Ruskin's account of the employer-employee relation, though exaggerated, contains enough truth to give it a sting as an indictment of contemporary industrial practice. He is saying that hours are based on what the workman can stand, that wages are set by supply and demand rather than by the requirements of decent food and housing, that freedom of contract conduces to oppressive and irresponsible conduct on the part of the employer. There is justice in this indictment, although it takes no account of certain protective legislation, some of which was sponsored by the political economists themselves. Of course, his illustration of the inhuman domestic employer who takes all the servant will endure and gives as little as he can in return is not "the politico-economical view of the case, according to the doctors of that science" unless those economists can be shown to have endorsed unlimited *laissez-faire,* and we have seen that such endorsement was apparently not their intention.

The chief difference, according to Ruskin, between domestic and military service on the one hand and industrial labor on the other is that servants and soldiers are hired at definite wages for definite periods, whereas the wage and period of work given the industrial worker

depend on the state of trade. So Ruskin posits the question: How is it possible to maintain a fixed number of workmen at regular wages? He follows with what has become one of the best-known passages in his work:

> Perhaps one of the most curious facts in the history of human error is the denial by the common political economist of the possibility of thus regulating wages; while, for all the important, and much of the unimportant, labour, on the earth, wages are already so regulated.
>
> We do not sell our prime-ministership by Dutch auction; nor, on the decease of a bishop, whatever may be the general advantages of simony, do we (yet) offer his diocese to the clergyman who will take the episcopacy at the lowest contract. We (with exquisite sagacity of political economy!) do indeed sell commissions; but not openly, generalships: sick, we do not inquire for a physician who takes less than a guinea; litigious, we never think of reducing six-and-eightpence to four-and-sixpence; caught in a shower, we do not canvass the cabman, to find one who values his driving at less than sixpence a mile. (p. 33).

Ruskin says here that the "common political economist" denies the possibility of regulating wages without regard to supply and demand; yet his passage is so similar to the following one from Mill's *Principles* that it might easily be thought merely an amplification of Mill's statement: "In many trades the terms on which business is done are a matter of positive arrangement among the trade . . . . All professional remuneration is regulated by custom. The fees of physicians, surgeons, and barristers, the charges of attorneys, are nearly invariable." [20] Is not Mill, then, a "common political economist"? Evidence could be cited to show that Mill's economy qualifies the special case of orthodox economics sufficiently to be considered a transition to later theory. But since Ruskin uses illustrations from Mill's works on various occasions after speaking of the views of "ordinary" or "common" or

"vulgar" political economists, it is apparent that he has Mill in mind.

Is Ruskin's statement a conscious misrepresentation of fact? It is clear that Ruskin knew Mill's treatise better than he knew any other work on political economy. Though there is no way of telling whether he annotated his personal copy of Mill's *Principles* before 1860, his copious quotations from that work in *Unto This Last* show that Mill's book was constantly within arm's reach. The question may be profitably considered further, for it involves Ruskin's general attitude toward Mill. There is some evidence to show that Ruskin found what he wanted to find in Mill's *Principles.* When he finds himself in total disagreement with Mill—as in the case of the passage beginning "Everyone has a notion"—he ridicules Mill without reserve. When he finds himself in partial agreement, he still ridicules and attempts to show that Mill does not understand the purport of his own statements. For instance, later on in *Unto This Last* Ruskin says, "I should have regretted the need of pointing out inconsistency in any portion of Mr. Mill's work, had not the value of his work proceeded from its inconsistencies. He deserves honour among economists by inadvertently disclaiming the principles which he states, and tacitly introducing the moral considerations with which he declares his science has no connection. Many of his chapters are, therefore, true and valuable; and the only conclusions of his which I have to dispute are those which follow from his premises" (p. 79). But no scientist worthy of the name is unaware of residual implications. Talcott Parsons has a very wise statement when he says that works of the best exponents of a system always contain ammuni-

tion for the destruction of the system itself and that is the chief reason those works are difficult. "Only the lesser lights," he states, "can bring themselves to dogmatize about the exclusive importance and adequacy of their own positively defined categories." [21] We have seen that Mill does not dogmatize on the conclusions to be drawn from his premises.

A striking example of Ruskin's treatment of Mill occurs in *Time and Tide*. Its presentation may aid in the understanding of the passage under consideration and of others later on in *Unto This Last*. Ruskin quotes the following passage from Mill's *Principles:* ". . . in no sound theory of private property was it ever contemplated that the proprietor of land should be merely a sinecurist quartered on it." Then he says:

> But Mr. Mill instantly retreats from this perilous admission; and after three or four pages of discussion . . . he begs the whole question at issue in one brief sentence, slipped cunningly into the middle of a long one which appears to be telling all the other way, and in which the fatal assertion (of the right to rent) nestles itself, as if it had been already proved,—thus—I italicise the unproved assertion in which the venom of the entire falsehood is concentrated.
>
> "Even in the case of cultivated land, a man whom, though only one among millions, the law permits to hold thousands of acres as his single share, is not entitled to think that all is given to him to use and abuse, and deal with it as if it concerned nobody but himself. *The rents or profits which he can obtain from it are his, and his only;* but with regard to the land, in everything which he abstains from doing, he is morally bound, and should, whenever the case admits, be legally compelled to make his interest and pleasure consistent with the public good." (XVII, 442-443)

Mill evidently intends the italicized clause to be interpreted legally; Ruskin interprets it morally. The important thing to notice here, however, is that twenty years later (1868) Mill amplified the argument which Ruskin terms

self-contradictory, and applied it to the Irish land situation in the pamphlet *England and Ireland.* In that year Ruskin pasted in his copy of Mill's *Principles,* close to the passage just quoted, a clipping from the *Pall Mall Gazette* criticizing the pamphlet. Beside it he wrote, "Mill right at last, and attacked for being so" (p. 444). But Mill is as "right" in the passage Ruskin objects to as he is in the pamphlet. Except for the attack, Ruskin might well have found the pamphlet full of equivocation. And though Ruskin thus confesses privately a community of opinion with Mill, he never publishes such an admission, and he continues to heap scorn upon Mill throughout *Fors Clavigera.*

The last several pages of the first essay (pp. 36-42) contain Ruskin's presentation of the necessity to professionalize business. He asks, Why are professional men honored as public servants and businessmen regarded as inferior to them? Because the latter are "presumed to act always selfishly," he answers. R. H. Tawney has a passage similar to Ruskin's: the idea that there is an essential difference between makers and firers of shells, between builders of schools and teachers, so that one group is expected to seek only pecuniary gain while the other gets paid for services performed "is an illusion only less astonishing than that the leaders of industry should welcome the insult as an honor and wear their humility as a kind of halo." [22] A large part of Tawney's book is taken up with the need to professionalize industry. Or as Ruskin says, it is the merchant's professional duty to produce or obtain the article he deals in "in perfect state" and to distribute it "at the cheapest possible price where it is most needed." In doing so he controls large groups of

people and is responsible for "the kind of life they lead."

This plea is addressed to Ruskin's contemporaries among the employer class. And in the part of *Unto This Last* under discussion Ruskin is suggesting only a change of attitude under existing conditions, not a political or economic change in the employer-employee relation itself. Elsewhere he does contemplate the more radical change. In *Time and Tide,* while distinguishing between cooperation in his own works and in those of his contemporaries, he says that he does not mean "by co-operation, that all the master bakers in a town are to give a share of their profits to the men who go out with the bread; but that the masters are not to try to undersell each other, nor seek each to get the other's business, but are to form one society, selling to the public under a common law of severe penalty for unjust dealings, and at an established price" (XVII, 317). This implies the guild organization which is considered one of the fundamental elements of Ruskin's social reform program. In *Fors Clavigera,* for instance, he divides all socially necessary labor into twenty-one types and states that each type finally should elect masters from the ranks, buy land, and furnish its own capital. The immediate measure to be taken is to "bring in by your new Parliaments . . . a system of land tenure, namely, by which your organized classes of labouring men may possess their land as corporate bodies, and add to it. . ." (XXIX, 411). Nevertheless, the preponderant evidence seems to justify the conclusion that Ruskin would like to see the captains of industry assume responsible captainship and remain in charge, that if business could somehow be moralized, or professionalized, he would rather not disturb the *status quo.* As he expresses it in *Time and Tide:*

"An arrangement may be supposed, and I have good hope also may one day be effected, by which every subordinate shall be paid sufficient and regular wages, according to his rank; by which due provision shall be made out of the profits of the business for sick and superannuated workers; and by which the master . . . shall on that condition, be permitted to retain to his own use the surplus profits of the business . . ." (XVII, 319-320).

The first pertinent passage in the second essay, "The Veins of Wealth," begins as follows: "The force of the guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbor's pocket . . ." (p. 44). Let us notice the discussion of this problem by J. A. R. Marriott. He tells the story of Mr. ——, who rose from grocer's assistant to be the head of a large firm and left a fortune. Mr. —— may have "jeopardized his own soul" by the way in which he acquired his wealth, but Marriott wishes particularly to inquire "whether in doing so he sinned against his neighbor as well as against himself." Then he adds, quoting from the passage under discussion: "If the wealth of one man implies the poverty of another the answer to this question cannot be in doubt. A great moralist has committed himself to this position: 'The art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbor poor.'" [23] But Ruskin does not commit himself in anything like the sense Marriott says he does. It is Ruskin's very point that the *process* of acquisition, and not the *fact,* is the important criterion. Mr. —— did jeopardize his own soul, Ruskin believed, and sin against his neighbor too, if he did not realize responsible stewardship. As he expresses it, "Some treasures are

heavy with human tears, as an ill-stored harvest with untimely rain; and some gold is brighter in sunshine than it is in substance" (p. 52). Marriott fails to give sufficient weight to the phrase "in the ordinary economist's sense." It has the same meaning as "in the common sense," for Ruskin uses the latter proviso in referring to the passage under discussion: "So that, as above stated, the art of becoming 'rich,' in the common sense, is not absolutely nor finally the art of accumulating much money for ourselves, but also of contriving that our neighbours shall have less" (p. 46).

A large part of the second essay is taken up with two examples of the production and exchange of wealth, in which Ruskin imagines the developing economic relations of men lost on a desert island. The first illustrates the diminution of the aggregate wealth brought about by the sickness and consequent debt of one of the men. The second illustrates the accumulation of wealth by a middleman by means of engrossing and forestalling. The agent watches "the course of each man's agriculture, keeps back the articles with which he has been entrusted until there comes a period of extreme necessity for them, on one side or other, and then exacts in exchange for them all that the distressed farmer can spare of other kinds of produce." Ruskin states that this is the way to acquire commercial wealth according to modern political economy (pp. 51-52). In dealing with the place of "merchant industry" under conditions of division of labor William Smart explains that this process is often misunderstood, "as if what the merchant did was simply to take toll of the goods as they passed through his hand; and it must be said that Mr. Ruskin has given countenance to this in

Unto This Last . . . . Perhaps it is too much to say that Mr. Ruskin really means this as typical, but he gives that impression by saying, 'This would be a case of commercial wealth acquired on the exactest principles of modern political economy'—which seems to infer that the operation known as a 'corner in wheat' . . . is the normal occupation of the merchant." [24] Smart follows with the common textbook portrayal of the merchant as a producer, if not of the article itself, then of its immediate utility. But Smart's explanation is for school boys. Ruskin is perfectly aware of the proper function of merchants. The passages under discussion are an indirect indictment of unscrupulous merchants and also of the science whose abstractions, Ruskin believes, permit interpretations and applications helpful to those unscrupulous merchants.

In explaining how the sick man in the first illustration has to pledge future labor for the aid he receives, Ruskin introduces his debt analysis of money, an analysis which in its essentials is the currently accepted view. Therefore this seems to be the appropriate place to consider his currency theory, which he develops at length in *Munera Pulveris.* "All money, properly so called," says Ruskin in the passage under discussion, "is an acknowledgment of debt; but as such, it may either be considered to represent the labour and property of the creditor, or the idleness and penury of the debtor" (p. 50). This idea he continues in *Munera Pulveris.* Since practically speaking all property is the result of labor, currency is a claim, or debt, against property. Therefore all property in a nation consists of currency and "store," so that ". . . whatever the claiming value of the currency is at any moment, that value is to

be deducted from the riches of the store-holders" (p. 204).[25]

If currency is always the negative sign of positive wealth, and if, as Ruskin holds, currency consists of orders for equivalent goods, why is this equilibrium not maintained? Ruskin resorts to a simpler societal arrangement, as he nearly always does in explaining his economic ideas, being in this respect similar to all the older economists. There is small need for a circulating medium "If a cattle breeder is content to live with his household chiefly on meat and milk, and does not want rich furniture, or jewels, or books . . . and the nation, as a whole, remains content with the produce of its own soil and the work of its own hands" (p. 191). The inordinate growth of currency in proportion to store he attributes to cultural ignorance, and in this way he links his currency theory with his doctrine of education in proper use. When people insist on always buying new things—as a result of the "bluntness of nature" of the storeholders—the power of currency increases: "for the less use people can make of things, the more they want of them, and the sooner weary of them" (p. 206).

Ruskin formulates his definition of currency briefly as follows: "The currency of any country consists of every document acknowledging debt, which is transferable in the country" (p. 194). In his discussion of this passage Hobson appends the following note: "Students of Monetary Science will recognize a kinship to the theory of Money championed by M'Leod, but Ruskin nowhere indorses the inclusion of all private Credit in Money, which is the kernel of M'Leod's teaching."[26] Ruskin certainly does not endorse the use of credit as money. He gives it his

unqualified denunciation because it *is* used for money and because it *does* hamper the free functioning of sound currency: "In all wise commerce payment, large or small, should be over the counter. If you can't pay for a thing—don't buy it. If you can't get paid for it—don't sell it. So, you will have calm days, drowsy nights, all the good business you have now, and none of the bad" (XXVII, 474). The subject of credit is closely associated with interest; there is little difference, except ordinarily in objective, between getting goods on credit and getting money on credit. But in Ruskin's mind there is a great difference. His reprobation of credit remains the same from *The Political Economy of Art* through *Fors Clavigera,* while his attitude on the taking of interest passes from complacency to violent condemnation.[27]

Another division of Ruskin's currency theory is his suggestion for tying the national currency to one or several other substances instead of gold (XVII, 199-200). In a letter to his father in 1863 he says that money would probably fluctuate in value less if it were based on food, but it would be hard to fix a standard, and then adds, "I would do it, if I were a king, but it is one of those things far more easily *done* than *said* . . ." (pp. 488-489). In *Unto This Last* he says that "A man's labour is a better standard of value than a measure of any produce . . ." (p. 50). This, as well as the suggestion of basing currency on food, is derivable from Adam Smith.

In closing his discussion of Ruskin's ideas on currency Hobson says that Ruskin's "insistance that all money means power over labour, authority over men, proves that he has brought his currency teaching into true organic relation with the rest of his political economy" (p. 142). And

Hobson seems to be right in assuming that to Ruskin money means power over labor; for according to Ruskin the "chief value and virtue of money consists in its having power over human beings" (XVII, 54). Money and commercial wealth are therefore similar; that is, a part of Ruskin's indictment is that mercantile economy confuses money and wealth. It is *mercantile* wealth of which Ruskin speaks when he says ". . . the establishment of the mercantile wealth which consists in a claim upon labour, signifies a political diminution of the real wealth which consists in substantial possessions" (p. 51).

It is important to keep Ruskin's intention in mind in the distinction between mercantile and real wealth as we notice the criticism of Frederick Soddy on Ruskin's currency theory. This is the proper place to note the general similarity of Soddy's economy to that of Ruskin and also Soddy's attitude toward Ruskin, since such information will enable us to appreciate fully Soddy's criticism on the point under discussion. Of the orthodox economist's practice of defining wealth as things whose value can be measured in money, Soddy states that money is merely a claim to wealth, and to define wealth as measurable by legal claims to wealth is circular reasoning. He then gives his explanation of the balance of wealth against debt. It enabled the orthodox economists to solve many difficulties merely to ignore them and to base wealth on exchangeability, but they should have seen that though a weight measures what is pulled up, it is really a pull down. So the idea of balancing "involves equating the quantity measured against an equal *and opposite* quantity. Wealth is the positive quantity to be measured and money as the claim to wealth is a debt . . . ." Soddy's contra-

distinction of commercial economy and national economy is similar to Ruskin's. The science that studies demands and how they exchange is chrematistics; economics considered nationally "is concerned with wealth as what is produced by human beings to maintain their lives." [28] And this wealth is absolute: "The preposterous idea that there is no such thing as Absolute Wealth, but that there must be someone, not the owner, who . . . is prepared to give up something for its possession" is a convenient commercial view but inapplicable to nations (p. 109). Finally, we should notice Soddy's "vital" definition of wealth, similar to Ruskin's statement "There is no wealth but life": "Money, credit, and other legal claims to wealth are debts. . . . Labour and inventions are not wealth, though essential factors in its production. The physical definition of wealth is a form or product of energy or work which enables or empowers life" (p. 118).

There are many tributes to Ruskin in Soddy's pages. One will suffice: "Ruskin, in solitary and picturesque protest against the hallucinations of his age, pleaded in vain for an economics founded upon life" (p. 94). But Ruskin "laboured heavily under the error he was trying to extirpate. Wealth to him still was inseparably connected with the lower passions and avarices of the struggle for existence . . ." (pp. 94-95). Also Soddy thinks that Ruskin "did not take into account sufficiently the effects of science in replacing animate by inanimate power" (p. 101). Ruskin may have taken insufficient account of artificial power, but his railing against machinery is not indiscriminate. In *Munera Pulveris* he places machinery in his list of valuable material things: "The value of instruments consists, first, in their power of shortening labour, or otherwise

accomplishing what human strength unaided could not." He also speaks there of the "uses of machinery on a colossal scale in accomplishing mighty and useful work" (XVII, 156).

The reason for discussing Soddy's theory and comments in this place, however, is to consider what seems to be his misunderstanding of Ruskin's statements on wealth and debt in their relation to currency. Soddy says: "It is not unfair to say that Ruskin never got beyond seeing that what passes for wealth in mercantile economy . . . is *also* debt. . . . The physical reality of wealth, apart altogether from legal claims, escaped his analysis. He copies Bishop Berkley in the aphorism, 'The essence of wealth consists of power over the lives and labours of others'—a definition of debt, but not of wealth" (pp. 99-100). It has already been noted, however, that to Ruskin money and mercantile wealth are similar and therefore constitute a "diminution" of real wealth. Soddy's argument is illogical here anyway. For even though there are other ways to obtain power over labor than by means of money (p. 54), and even though Ruskin does state that real wealth also exerts power over labor (p. 55), that still does not justify Soddy in assuming that Ruskinian wealth contains only the attribute of power over labor. Ruskin may have missed the "physical reality of wealth" as Soddy defines it, though Soddy's definition seems quite similar to that of Ruskin. But if the real nature of wealth escaped Ruskin, it is not because, as Soddy says, he failed to dissociate wealth from "legal claims."

While considering Ruskin's currency theory, we should notice *Gold: a Dialogue,* a work significant not only intrinsically but as an indication of the attitude Ruskin's

economic endeavors excited both pro and con. Although Froude, as editor of *Fraser's Magazine,* was forced in 1862 to discontinue the serial publication of *Munera Pulveris,* he soon afterwards told Ruskin that he would publish a reply to a *Times* letter written by J. E. Cairnes, which was itself a reply to a *Times* letter by Ruskin on the current gold controversy. Ruskin sent the dialogue to Froude, but it was apparently suppressed by John James Ruskin and remained unpublished until 1905 (XVII, 491-497). The beginning of Cairnes's letter shows the nature of the attack: "Mr. Ruskin has spoken. On the remote sides of Mont Blanc the echoes of the gold controversy reached him, and he hastens, ere it closes, to interpose the decisive word. Henceforth the problem for economists will be not what are the effects of the gold discoveries, but what is the purport of Mr. Ruskin's revelation. Let me attempt, with reverent humility, to expound the pregnant words." [29] The tone of Ruskin's reply is no less provocative. Since Cairnes's letter has been "copied with acclaim" in other journals, ". . . it becomes worth the few words it needs for extinction; which I will therefore spare to it . . ." (p. 493).

The chief point at issue is the extent to which gold imported from Australia and California affected the value of the pound. Cairnes does not here argue his own attitude—which, as elsewhere developed,[30] seems to be that the gold discoveries had an inflational effect on British currency somewhat more direct than was commonly supposed—but merely quotes Ruskin and intersperses ironical comments. Ruskin's attitude is that no one doubts such inflational effect in the long run: ". . . that final effect I had stated long ago in these terms—'When the

existing wealth or available labour is once fully represented, every piece of money thrown into circulation diminishes the value of every other existing piece in the proportion it bears to their number.' " The purpose of his *Times* letter, he says, was to question "the immediate traceable effect": ". . . the entire gist of it was to deny the possibility of connecting any present visible phenomena of price with the influx of gold, because those presently visible phenomena were equally regulated by thousands of other conditions" (pp. 496-497). Ruskin's argument in the dialogue is incomplete, since he had already in his *Times* letter outlined the ways in which the saving and spending habits of a nation affect the value of currency, and had concluded as follows: "These agencies of daily economy have so much more power over the market than the supply from the mine that no statistics of which we are yet in possession are . . . sufficient to prove the dependence of any given phenomena of the market on the rate of metallic supply. The destruction of property in the American war and our European amusements in the manufacture of monster guns . . . lower the value of money far more surely and fatally than an increased supply of bullion, for the latter may very possibly excite parallel force of productive industry" (p. 490). On all these points Ruskin seems to be closer to modern economic thought than is Cairnes, though even Ruskin, in his remarks on the ultimate balance of currency and goods, exhibits more faith in the practical aspects of the quantity theory of money than most modern economists would consider justifiable.

In this greatest of his social works Ruskin takes up all of his destructive and constructive economics, however

fragmentary may be the treatment on some points. Here, on the first page of "Qui Judicatis Terram," he glances at the evils of advertising. His antipathy to advertising is a natural consequence of his theory of wealth and utility. An economy based upon the production of good material in answer to sane demand according to need would find no place for the prevalent types of advertising, he believes. He introduces the topic by quotation from the Bible, one of his favorite devices: "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death. . . ." And he adds, striking at the same time at false advertising, corrupt practices of adulteration and the giving of false weights, "If we read . . . 'lying label, title, pretence, or advertisement,' we shall more clearly perceive the bearing of the words on modern business" (pp. 57-58). In *Time and Tide* he writes that new or improved articles accepted by the trade guild should be announced in public reports so that "all puffery and self-proclamation" would be unnecessary (p. 385). He even got so he would not advertise his own books. One is reminded of Stuart Chase, who ends his list of "wastes" with advertising, since it is "a sort of godfather of them all." Incidentally, he also introduces his list with "Wastes in consumption, or 'illth.' " [31]

Having stated that the ordinary political economist calls his subject the science of getting rich, Ruskin continues, "But there are many sciences, as well as arts, of getting rich," such as poisoning in the old days and adulteration in the new. He argues, then, that the "popular economist" must admit that his is the science of "getting rich by legal or just means." In this manner he introduces the subject of the essay: "Ye who judge the earth, give . . .

diligent love to justice . . . ." Thus he brings up the chief question of the essay: What are the laws of just payment of labor? Money payment "consists radically in a promise to some person working for us, that for the time and labour he spends in our service to-day we will give or procure equivalent time and labour in his service at any future time when he may demand it." This apparently means that the just money payment of a piece of work is the amount which will enable the worker to get in exchange a value equivalent to the value of the work done. But how, if he has not been paid the sum which represents the value of his work, can he expect an equivalent value in exchange? And in many operations a workman could not be paid for the full value of his work, for there would then be no profit in hiring him. Again, Ruskin states that "absolute equity" in the payment of labor "can only consist in giving time for time, strength for strength, and skill for skill. If a man works an hour for us, and we only promise to work half an hour for him in return, we obtain an unjust advantage . . . . The justice consists in absolute exchange" (pp. 61-65). But how can Ruskin mean that equal amounts of work are equal in value? Value is for him a quality which varies with the power of the work to "avail for life." Men being unequal in power (p. 74), their work would necessarily be of different value. Again, Ruskin says that there is "no equitable reason in a man's being poor, that if he give me a pound of bread to-day, I should return him less than a pound of bread to-morrow; or any equitable reason in a man's being uneducated, that if he uses a certain quantity of skill and knowledge in my service, I should use a less quantity of skill and knowledge in his" (p. 65). But if a man is un-

educated or unskilled, can he with "equitable reason" trade in time, strength, and skill with a skilled worker, who throws into the balance a hoarded store of past time in the form of training? [32]

Ruskin is aware of the difficulty of ascertaining a just wage, but a "practically serviceable" estimate can be obtained, for "It is easier to determine scientifically what a man ought to have for his work, than what his necessities will compel him to take for it" (p. 68). This passage exhibits Ruskin as a pioneer in the living wage movement. As he suggests in a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1867, let a committee of physicians decide on the kind of food and lodging and the number of hours a worker can "without shortening his life, work at such business daily if so sustained." And then let the workmen choose between the money covering that estimate and the market wage for the same number of hours (pp. 473-474). The Webbs give Lloyd Jones (*Beehive,* July 1874) credit for originating the term "living wage"—"Such a one as will secure sufficiency of food, and some degree of personal and home comfort to the worker; not a miserable allowance to starve on, but *living wages.*" [33] Ruskin barely misses using it in numbers of passages that contain such expressions as "availing towards life," "sustaining of life," "life-giving power." Hobson comments on Ruskin's 1867 letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette,* "Here, too, as in many other instances, we find expert economists following in his footsteps." But Hobson objects to Ruskin's making physical considerations the sole criterion of the wage: ". . . though the idea of a physical replacement of energy given out in work forms a sound basis for a minimum wage, to make it the sole regulator of the price of labour

would be to ignore entirely the claim of the labourer to share the gain arising from the productivity of labour over and above a mere replacement." Ruskin does not deny that the wage should be based upon considerations other than physical. He is always interested in the provision of the "nobler necessities" (XXVII, 646-647). But in the *Pall Mall Gazette* letter he is concerned that the wage earner should get at least the physical minimum.

Close to the end of "Qui Judicatis Terram" is one of the many passages in the works in which Ruskin advocates free trade: ". . . I am, and always have been an utterly fearless and unscrupulous free-trader" (XVII, 72). Three pages further on occurs one of his many denunciations of competition: "Anarchy and competition [are] the Laws of Death" (p. 75). Since competition is a necessary concomitant of free trade, Ruskin's attitude here seems to be entirely contradictory. He supports this attitude by what appears to be some of the loosest reasoning in his works. The passage under consideration continues as follows: "Most people's minds are in curious confusion on the subject of free-trade, because they suppose it to imply enlarged competition. On the contrary, free-trade puts an end to all competition . . . . When trade is entirely free, no country can be competed with in the articles for the production of which it is naturally calculated . . . . Competition, indeed, arises at first, and sharply, in order to prove which is the strongest in any given manufacture possible to both; this point once ascertained, competition is at an end" (p. 72). But what is this time Ruskin calls "at first," a time when competition is sharp? If competition occurs at first on every new product, then it will continue

from first to last, for new products never cease to come on the market. Again, under what circumstances is a country "naturally calculated" to produce a certain article so that it can prove its supremacy in that article? Might it not be because of parasitic trade conditions? Might not a country force the working population to accept a wage barely covering subsistence in order to compete successfully? Might not a country be naturally calculated to produce a great number of articles and undersell neighbors, so that the victimized nations either go to war or suffer economic annihilation? Successful competition does not necessarily show which nation is strongest in any sense in which Ruskin would have accepted the adjective.

As Ruskin explains in the preface to *Munera Pulveris,* he was given permission by Thackeray to make "Ad Valorem" longer than the other essays. In its present form it is a condensation of the four final essays which Ruskin had planned for publication in *Cornhill Magazine* (pp. 81, 143). We shall continue our study of some of the details of Ruskin's argument, considering first another of his attacks on Mill, with which this final essay of *Unto This Last* opens. Ruskin says:

> . . . Mr. J. S. Mill instances, as a capitalist, a hardware manufacturer, who, having intended to spend a certain portion of the proceeds of his business in buying plate and jewels, changes his mind, and "pays it as wages to additional workpeople." The effect is stated by Mr. Mill to be, that "more food is appropriated to the consumption of productive labourers."
>
> Now I do not ask, though, had I written this paragraph, it would surely have been asked of me, What is to become of the silversmiths? If they are truly unproductive persons, we will acquiesce in their extinction. . . . But I very seriously inquire why ironware is produce, and silverware is not? . . . The merchant is an agent of conveyance to the consumer in one case, and is himself the consumer

in the other: but the labourers are in either case equally productive, since they have produced goods to the same value, if the hardware and the plate are both goods. (pp. 77-78)

Throughout the passage Ruskin is arguing beside the question. In the first place, Mill is using the hardware illustration to show what is capital and what is not. Capital, Mill states, is that part of a man's possessions "which is to constitute his fund for carrying on fresh production." All Mill is saying, then, is that when a man decides to manufacture more hardware, he uses a part of his income which is called capital, and that when that part of his income is so used, it is said to be used productively, since it is used to feed, house, and furnish tools for workmen who are producing.

On the other hand, Mill is saying that when a man decides to buy plate, he is not employing his money productively. But Mill does not mean in this passage, as Ruskin assumes that he does, that laborers employed to produce plate are less productive than those employed to produce hardware. Such might be the case, since the hardware is more likely to be used in further productive processes, but Mill is not here considering that part of the problem. Let us change the illustration somewhat. Suppose that Mill's merchant had planned to buy a fine collection of display pistols and that he decided instead to invest the money in the manufacture of silver plate. He has in that case decided against unproductive expenditure on ironware in favor of productive expenditure on silverware. In other words, Mill is speaking of immediate production, Ruskin of the replacement of the article which called forth the unproductive expenditure.

However, though Ruskin's argument is inapplicable to

Mill's passage on capital, Ruskin is really taking issue on the distinction between "productive" and "unproductive" in Mill's works. Let us notice, then, Mill's distinction before considering further Ruskin's criticism. Having treated of productive labor as that kind of labor which is an indispensable factor of production, Mill adds, however, that "There is much labour, and of a high order of usefulness, of which production is not the object. Labour has accordingly been distinguished into Productive and Unproductive." Note here that unproductive labor may be highly useful, and he continues in the same vein: "Production not being the sole end of human existence, the term unproductive does not necessarily imply any stigma; nor was ever intended to do so in the present case." Labor is said by political economists to be unproductive when it "ends in immediate enjoyment, without any increase of the accumulated stock of permanent means of enjoyment. And all labour, according to our present definition, must be classed as unproductive, which terminates in a permanent benefit, however important, provided that an increase of material products forms no part of that benefit. . . . Unproductive may be as useful as productive labour; it may be more useful, even in point of permanent advantage . . . . In any case, society or mankind grow no richer by it, but poorer." And to grow richer in Mill's sense here means to increase in "accumulated stock" for purposes of production.[34]

Mill also makes the distinction between productive and unproductive consumption: "That alone is productive consumption which goes to maintain and increase the productive powers of the community; either those residing in its soil, in its materials, in the number and efficiency

of its instruments of production, or in its people." Again, however, "unproductive consumption" is not to Mill a term of derogation. In a rich country a great part of the annual produce goes into unproductive consumption, and it would be a great mistake "to lament that the community has so much to spare from its necessities, for its pleasures and for all higher uses" (pp. 52-53). With this distinction clearly in mind another typical passage should be noticed in which Ruskin seems either to misunderstand or to misinterpret Mill's statements. In *A Joy for Ever* Ruskin speaks of Mill's statement that ". . . a man who makes a coat, if the person who wears the coat does nothing useful while he wears it, has done no more good to society than the man who has only raised a pineapple" (XVI, 131). Time rather than Ruskin has invalidated Mill's pre-vitamin comparison, but the argument is still sound. For he is not making a statement about doing useful things; he is talking about productive labor. And he does not say that the tailor is unproductively employed when making things for unproductive consumers, but only that society is not permanently richer in material things after the coat is worn out by an unproductive consumer (p. 52).

The distinction between "productive" and "unproductive" has become outmoded, and Ruskin's use of the terms is more modern than is Mill's. It was always merely a terminological distinction, and it is the terminology that Ruskin objects to. He recognizes the factual basis of the distinction toward the end of "Ad Valorem," where he portrays a commonwealth of forty agriculturists who decide to support ten of their number in unproductive occupations, scientific and educative (XVII, 109). And as

Ruskin recognizes the distinction, so have all other economists past and present. In the real world factories and dwellings might be identical, as when the interior decorator takes over a residence to use as a shop and display room. But in the economist's world they are poles apart, for there a factory is a unit of capital (a factor of production), and a dwelling is a unit of durable consumer goods; that is, one is productive and the other is unproductive in the orthodox economist's sense, whatever we wish to call it. Unless some such distinction is made, economists just cannot deal with certain types of problems, and there is an end of it. Ruskin was wrong to ignore a terminological distinction which had been made in economic treatises since the days of the mercantilists, especially as it has been demonstrated that he knew better. He complained bitterly that contemporary economists gave him no sympathetic understanding. He should have tried to give a little himself.

Having disposed of Mill to his own satisfaction in several pages of argument, some of which has already been considered in a former chapter, Ruskin has a brief round with Ricardo. He first quotes from the first page of Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy:* "Utility is not the measure of exchangeable value, though it is absolutely essential to it." After some discussion Ruskin remarks that he does not like the look of this definition but that he will let Ricardo illustrate it with his own example. So in order to do so he skips over to "Section III," where Ricardo is discussing value, and quotes the following "example": "Suppose that in the early stages of society the bows and arrows of the hunters were of equal value with the implements of the fisherman. Under such cir-

cumstances the value of the deer, the produce of the hunter's day's labour, would be exactly equal to the value of the fish, the product of the fisherman's day's labour. The comparative value of the fish and game would be *entirely* regulated by the quantity of labour realized in each" (Ruskin's italics). Now utility and value are to Ruskin the same thing, but Ricardo definitely excludes that kind of utility from consideration. Therefore when Ruskin quotes Ricardo's example, he is only falsifying Ricardo's purpose, which is to illustrate his own labor theory of value, not Ruskin's concept of utility. But let us continue Ruskin's argument. The illustration apparently means, he says, that "if the average product of a day's work of fisher and hunter be one fish and one deer, the one fish will always be equal in value to the one deer." Then he adds slyly, "Might I inquire the species of fish? Whale? or whitebait?" (XVII, 82-83). Ruskin apparently does not give full value to the word "realized" in Ricardo's passage. If the fisherman's labor is realized, that seems to mean that an average amount of labor will become realized in a certain number of fish. If that number cannot on an average be realized by fishing in the customary river, the fisherman must go to another. If the cost in labor and time of transporting the haul from the new place is too great, so that it no longer pays him to expend such time and effort, then fish can no longer compete with deer as a staple diet. That still does not preclude the possibility that fish might thenceforward be prized as a delicacy, so that an occasional fish—even a whitebait—might be equal in value to a deer, if the consumer has enough deer handy to make his meal on. It should be obvious that the purpose here in following through such arguments is to consider

the quality of Ruskin's reasoning, not whether Ruskin's ideas fit nineteenth- or twentieth-century conditions. In such arguments—in a former one where Ruskin was using Robinson Crusoe type fictions as well as in the present one—Ruskin is dealing with principles, not applications, and even in principle Ruskin's labor theory of value is as dead as Ricardo's is to the modern economist.

Next Ruskin takes up another one of his favorite topics, an especially puzzling one: "Note first, of exchange, there can be no *profit* in it. It is only in labour there can be profit . . ." (pp. 90-93). But does not exchange involve labor of buying, storing at the proper place so that goods will be available, breaking into small lots, and displaying? Ruskin does not deny that, for he states that "If labour is necessary to effect the exchange, that labour is in reality involved in the production, and, like all other labour, bears profit." Perhaps, then, Ruskin means to derogate only that type of exchange which involves gambling and forestalling. If so his position is tenable, but let us follow closely Ruskin's own argument: "Thus, one man, by sowing and reaping, turns one measure of corn into two measures. That is Profit. Another, by digging and forging, turns one spade into two spades. That is Profit. . . . They exchange the gained grain for the gained tool; and both are the better for the exchange; but though there is much advantage in the transaction, there is no profit. Nothing is constructed or produced." It is hard to see the significance of the difference which Ruskin makes here. Does not the exchange build the forger's muscles, and does not the spade enable the farmer to produce more grain? Ruskin continues his argument: "Only that which had been before constructed is given to the person by whom

it can be used." But to place material in the hands of those who can use it is to produce wealth, according to Ruskin; to leave it in the hands of those who cannot use it may be to produce illth. So Ruskin seems to contradict himself. Let us follow the argument further: "There may, however, be acquisition, which is a very different thing. If, in the exchange, one man is able to give what cost him little labour for what has cost the other much, he 'acquires' a certain quantity of the produce of the other's labour. And precisely what he acquires, the other loses." Not necessarily, for all men are unequal, according to Ruskin; if one man is cleverer than the other, he might be able to produce goods of the same value in half the time. Then in time the cleverer of the two would be able to produce more and save, so that he would be able to control the labor of the other man. Suppose he should. Then he would be able to teach the other to produce more. Since in the beginning the cleverer of the two was twice as productive, the combined effort should now be perhaps half again as productive as it was in the beginning. Let the cleverer of the two continue the process, and he becomes the director of the labor of a hundred men with the possibility of benefit to all, since the advantage he has gained by the *exchange* of his work for theirs results in a gain to him. Then it is possible for all the workers to get the same remuneration that their own work would give them, plus a part of that surplus which results from the concerted action of all the workers directed by the superior ability of the manager.

So Ruskin seems to be wrong again, for he says, "Whenever a material gain follows exchange, for every *plus* there is a precisely equal *minus*." What is the explana-

tion? It is true that for every plus there is a minus if the man with the power of directing the labor of others takes the whole surplus for himself as profit and leaves to the worker only as much as will keep him alive. But it is not true if the employer applies some of the surplus to the reduction of the effects of the minuses, by going into the "dark streets" (p. 43) and correcting, or demanding that the government correct, the hidden evils there. It is not true if justice rules the conduct of all sorts of exchanges. And Ruskin would have agreed that by the rule of justice profit can accrue by means of exchange, had he not attached a special significance to the word "profit." Ruskin admits that he is not stigmatizing the science of exchange as such: "So far, therefore, as the science of exchange relates to the advantage of one of the exchanging parties only, it is founded on the ignorance or incapacity of the opposite person." That is, he says "so far as," not "because." And as he admits that the science of exchange is not entirely bad, he also appreciates the function of the person effecting the exchange, since he insists not only that "There must be advantage on both sides (or if only on one, at least no disadvantage on the other) to the persons exchanging" but also that there be "just payment for his time, intelligence, and labour to any intermediate person effecting the transaction." His remark about middlemen at the end of *Unto This Last* is pertinent to the discussion: ". . . the evils attendant on the abuse of such intermediate functions result not from any alleged principle of modern political economy, but from private carelessness or iniquity" (p. 113).

The above argument does not explain wholly Ruskin's intent, nor does it explain away his inconsistency. He

never denies that advantage accrues from exchange, but he does deny that profit can result from it. Hobson deals with the problem as follows:

> Mr. Ruskin's denial of "profit" to exchange, though a perverse and arbitrary judgment, would, however, be innocent if it had not visibly misled its author into later criticisms of exchange, which, if they have any meaning, signify that there can be no two-sided gain in exchange. This strange obliquity shows itself . . . in "Unto This Last," where he condemns the whole science and practice of exchange, on the ground that the "advantage" of exchange depends on cheating. "If I can exchange a needle with a savage for a diamond, my power of doing so depends either on the savage's ignorance of social arrangements in Europe, or on his want of power to take advantage of them, by selling the diamond to any one else for more needles. If, farther, I make the bargain as completely advantageous to myself as possible, by giving to the savage a needle with no eye in it (reaching thus a sufficiently satisfactory type of the perfect operation of catallactic science), the advantage to me in the entire transaction depends wholly upon the ignorance, powerlessness, or heedlessness of the person dealt with. Do away with these, and catallactic advantage becomes impossible." [85]

However, Ruskin does not, as Hobson says he does, hold that "there can be no two-sided gain in exchange"; and though he does show "strange obliquity," he does not condemn "the whole science and practice of exchange." Ruskin uses the eyeless needle transaction to illustrate what he calls a "science of darkness," a "bastard science," not to illustrate what he calls the science of "just or economical exchange" (XVII, 92-93). But Hobson is certainly right in saying that Ruskin's failure to make clear his distinction between profit and advantage is "unfortunate."

Sufficient discussion and illustration has probably been given to enable the reader to get an adequate idea of Ruskin's method of controversy and of his general argu-

ment. Before leaving *Unto This Last,* however, we shall notice a few more instances of Ruskin's similarity to other writers on economic subjects. Ruskin says, "The price of anything is the quantity of labour given by the person desiring it, in order to obtain possession of it" (p. 94). Ruskin here shows similarity to Adam Smith. His "value" is similar to Smith's "value in use," as seen in Smith's passage quoted on page 44 of this study. His "cost" is similar to Smith's "real price" in the following passage from *The Wealth of Nations:* "The real price of everything, what everything really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it" (Bk. I, Ch. 5, p. 31). And since to Ruskin money is the promise to give or acquire labor (XVII, 64), Ruskin's "price" is similar to Smith's "nominal price," or quantity of money. In fact, I suspect Ruskin of having kept *The Wealth of Nations* open before him while he wrote the pages under discussion. The following passages are apparently more similar in word and idea than can be accounted for by subject matter and chance:

The quality and kind of labour being given, its value . . . is invariable. But the quantity of it which must be given for other things is variable: and in estimating this variation, the price of other things must always be counted by the quantity of labour; not the price of labour by the quantity of other things. . . . What is commonly called cheapness of labour, signifies, therefore, in reality, that many obstacles have to be overcome by it; so that much labour is required.

Equal quantities of labour, at all times and places, may be said to be of equal value to the labourer. . . . The price which he pays must always be the same, whatever may be the quantity of goods which he receives in return for it . . . but it is their value which varies, not that of the labour which purchases them. At all times and places that is dear which it is difficult to come at, or which it costs much labour to acquire . . . . It [labour] appears to him dear in

quired to produce a small result. But this should never be spoken of as cheapness of labour, but as dearness of the objects sought for. (*Unto This Last,* XVII, 95-96)

the one case and cheap in the other. In reality, however, it is the goods which are cheap in the one case, and dear in the other. (*The Wealth of Nations,* Bk. I, Ch. 5, p. 34)

To Ruskin price is the result of four variables: "*A*. The quantity of wish the purchaser has for the thing; opposed to α, the quantity of wish the seller has to keep it. *B*. The quantity of labour the purchaser can afford, to obtains the thing: opposed to β, the quantity of labour the seller can afford, to keep it. These quantities are operative only in excess: i.e., the quantity of wish (*A*) means the quantity of wish for this thing, above wish for other things; and the quantity of work (*B*) means the quantity which can be spared to buy this thing from the quantity needed to get other things" (p. 94). The first part of Ruskin's analysis covers what is usually understood as supply and demand, though Ruskin did not like to call them that because of his antipathy to the terms themselves. At any rate, the first of this quotation covers what is ordinarily called a particular or partial equilibrium analysis, and his remark on quantities operating in excess would bring in the factors necessary for a general equilibrium analysis. There is also here, and elsewhere when Ruskin speaks of price, a suggestion of a marginal interpretation, but many of the older economists were aware of the marginal principle long before the advent of Jevons and the Austrians. In his ideas on price Ruskin seems to have been influenced by Thomas De Quincey, that amazing dabbler in many fields who is much more than a dabbler in economic theory. In the

manuscript of *Unto This Last,* though not in the original published form, Ruskin uses price illustrations from De Quincey's *Dialogues of Three Templars* (p. 83).

In another discussion the passage has been noted in which Ruskin reproves economists for their neglect of consumption: "Economists usually speak as if there were no good in consumption absolute. So far from this being so, consumption is the end, crown, and perfection of production" (p. 98). In a note to this passage Ruskin says, "When Mr. Mill speaks of productive consumption, he only means consumption which results in increase of capital or material wealth." Ruskin is right, of course, in regard to the definition of productive consumption, but it is pure nonsense to imply that Mill asserts that there is "no good" in other kinds of consumption. We have already seen that Mill merely means by unproductive consumption all types of consumption not directly concerned with the production of material wealth; that is, unproductive consumption is consumption for "pleasures and for all higher uses." Perhaps Ruskin is not to be criticized severely for this interpretation when the trained economist can make the same error. According to Hobson, "This distinction, so far as it has meaning, rests on the audacious claim that consumption, for economic policy, is only a means and instrument to further production. Consumption that is 'unproductive' i.e. not directly conducive to economic efficiency, is matter for reprobation." [36]

In considering Ruskin's consumption economy it is appropriate to mention the relation between Ruskin and William Smart (1853-1915), whose commentaries have been used several times in the discussion, for in this respect more than in any other part of his economics Smart

seems to show Ruskin's influence. "The producing man is, essentially, the servant of the consuming man," says Smart, "and the final direction of industry lies with the consumers." As consumers we have two responsibilities: first "for the conditions under which goods are made," second, "for their being made at all." It is not enough "to see that workers are paid decent wages, if the commodities they insist on buying are—say, fireworks." The rich man has almost never been told that money "is better spent in wise consumption than in indiscriminate investment." [37] In the same volume Smart says that during his "apprenticeship to industry" he was "fortunate enough to fall under the influence, personal and literary, of Mr. Ruskin, by whom my thoughts were turned to questions of wealth and its consumption" (p. ix). Smart is referring to the many years he spent in the textile industry, lecturing at the same time in various universities. On the founding of the Adam Smith professorship of political economy at Glasgow, he became the first to fill the chair. He is known to economic theory chiefly as one of the best English exponents of Austrian marginal utility economics.

Evidently there was a good deal of contact between Ruskin and Smart, but there is only one letter on record, which we have already noticed in a former discussion. In his *Second Thoughts of an Economist* Smart speaks of Ruskin as "an influence which soon became overwhelming because of the greatness of the man and the intimacy of our friendship." He continues, "It seemed to me that there never was a more entirely lovable man nor one who tried harder to carry out the principles which he preached. I carried my hero worship, indeed, to what might be thought an extravagant length. I became a member of his

band of disciples, the Guild of St. George" (p. 2). This leads us to the last passage to be noticed in *Unto This Last:* "There is no wealth but life," among other things a summary of Ruskin's consumption economy. In his *Studies in Economics* Smart quotes these words in the margin of a passage indicting the industrial organization of his own day: "Not only does it make the life of the vast majority a life below the level of good food, good clothing, good houses, good surroundings generally, but it totally neglects the other conditions,—the healthy labour which alone can knit these into the healthy man. It looks on labour as a mere means to an end, the obtaining of subsistence, instead of looking at both labour and subsistence as a means to—living" (p. 326). It should be obvious that Smart adopted some of Ruskin's ideas. Students of Ruskin will doubtless recognize similar stylistic devices as well, such as word usages, pauses at the ends of sentences, and characteristic rhetorical repetition. In *Second Thoughts* Smart paraphrases Ruskin's words quoted above as "The energies which make wealth must become the energies which make man" (p. 110).

Ruskin's famous passage under discussion is also quoted by Lewis Mumford as an introduction to his argument on the necessary interrelation of the right kinds of consumption and production in modern industry. "Wasteful consumption" always means "shoddy workmanship." If the machine system is to develop efficiency and integrity, "we must create a corresponding stability of consumption." Parts of Mumford's discussion read like a commentary on Ruskinian ideas. Sane production requires "the reduction of trivial and degrading forms of work." It also means the refusal to make products devoid of social use, "since

there is no form of cruelty for a rational human being worse than making him produce goods that have no human value." [38]

In his impressive biography Derrick Leon says, "The main body of Ruskinian thought will become part of the integral outlook of a people when their fundamentally superficial criteria have crumbled to dust. For the main body of Ruskinian thought has the structure of eternity." [39] He is speaking of Ruskin's art theory, but since that theory involves finally all of Ruskin's social purpose, by implication he is also referring to the work considered in the present study. I believe this implication to be correct in regard to Ruskin's political economy. One must be careful, however, not to weaken by overstatement an essentially strong case. Ruskin never thought of himself as an innovator, but in his insistence on the social aspects of economic theory and practice he is an entirely legitimate vehicle of a fundamental current of classical and mediaeval thought which was revived by Sismondi, was emphasized by the historical and universal economics of Knies and Adam Müller, and has been continued in this century in Europe by Weber and Spann and in America by Veblen, Mitchel, and others.

Let us conclude. Ruskin was qualified, if not by training then by power of mind and keen insight, for the role of political economist. His indictment of orthodox political economy is without justification when applied to the work of the best exponents of orthodox doctrine, but is sound when applied to the popularization of that doctrine by primer writers and unqualified persons, and when applied to its abuse by industrialists. As a constructive

theorist Ruskin has shown the instincts of a true social economist, one who will be better appreciated when—if ever—men's societal ideals become the objects of persistent effort. And finally, Ruskin's place in the history of economic thought is not a negligible one.

Footnotes to Introduction

1. *Money, Morals and Manners* (London, 1935), pp. 78-79.
2. *Political Economy* (New York, translated from the 1913 edition), p. 19.

Footnotes to Chapter I

1. *Autobiographic Memoirs* (London, 1911), I, 230-231.
2. *The Works of John Ruskin,* ed. Cook and Wedderburn (London: 1903-1912), XVI, 9-10. All references are to this edition.
3. Ruskin got more of his ideas from the economists than he liked to admit. Here he gives an impassioned version of ideas from Adam Smith, who says that unless the government takes pains to prevent the evils resulting from the division of labor, the laborer "generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." Ruskin's illustrations of pin and nail manufacture apparently come from the same source. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford, 1880), Bk. V, Chap. I, p. 365 and Bk. I, Chap. I, pp. 6, 9-10. First published in 1776.
4. *Economy of the Labouring Classes* (London, 1857), pp. 46-47.
5. George Saintsbury, *Corrected Impressions* (London, 1895), p. 205.
6. John A. Hobson, *John Ruskin, Social Reformer* (Boston, 1898), pp. 32-33.
7. Chapter two of the *Essays on Political Economy* for *Fraser's Magazine,* later collected as *Munera Pulveris.*
8. *John Ruskin: His Life and Work* (Glasgow, 1880), p. 15.
9. *John Ruskin, Economist* (Edinburgh, 1884), pp. 35-42.
10. "Ruskin as a Political Economist," *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 2 (1888), 444-445.
11. *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* pp. 120-121.
12. "Lessons from Ruskin," *Economic Journal,* 8 (1898), 36.
13. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last,* ed. R. T. Ely (New York, 1901), p. xxiv.

Footnotes to Chapter II

1. *John Ruskin* (New York, 1903), p. 102.
2. *The Present Position and Prospects of Political Economy* (London, 1878), pp. 12-13.
3. *Second Thoughts of an Economist* (London, 1916), p. 14.

4. *Ruskin the Prophet and Other Centenary Studies* (London, 1920), p. 47.

5. *The Wealth of Nations,* Bk. I, Chap. 4, pp. 29-30.

6. *The Works of David Ricardo,* ed. McCulloch (London, 1876), p. 7. First edition 1817.

7. Utility, or usefulness, to Ruskin occurs when an object "of an availing nature" is placed "in availing hands" (XVII, 88); thus since "a truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength" (p. 84), usefulness and value are identical to Ruskin. So we might call Ruskin's value "usefulness-value." After detailing the senses in which the word "value" may be used—"cost-value," "exchange-value," "use-value," and "esteem-value"—L. M. Fraser says, ". . . use value is always now known to economists by a special word (as a rule, the word 'utility')—though the reason in this case is not that they are unaware that 'value' may mean usefulness, but that they are too well aware of this, and of the confusions to which it is liable to give rise." *Economic Thought and Language* (London, 1937), p. 60.

8. W. S. Jevons, *Principles of Economics* (London, 1905), p. 12.

9. *Principles of Economics* (London, 1936), p. 92. First edition 1890.

10. *Ruskin the Prophet and Other Centenary Studies,* p. 36.

11. This statement is not technically complete. Fraser divides the historic value theories into three groups according to the kind of non-exchange value which in their systems modifies exchange-value. In the labor and cost of production theories it is "embodied cost value," in the early marginal utility theories it is "use value," in later marginal and scarcity theories it is "esteem value." *Economic Thought and Language,* p. 107.

12. *Natural Elements of Political Economy* (London, 1855), p. 199.

13. *Ruskin the Prophet and Other Centenary Studies,* p. 98.

14. "The Need for Simpler Economics," *Economic Journal,* 43 (1933), 369.

15. *The Present Position and Prospects of Political Economy,* pp. 13-15.

16. *The Scope and Method of Political Economy* (London, 1930), p. 9. First edition, 1891.

Footnotes to Chapter III

1. "Political Economy," *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* (London, 1850), pp. 1-6. This work was published first in 1836 and was the first "manual" of political economy. His *Introductory Lecture on Political Economy* (1826) was also influential.

2. William Smart says, "In political economy a word is certainly needed to express the sum of things having exchange value. But it is exceedingly unfortunate, for a science which rests on an analysis of industrial life and cannot afford to neglect the common meaning of common words, that the older economists should have used the word 'wealth' for this purpose." *Studies in Economics* (London, 1895), p. 219.

3. *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (London, 1844), pp. 136-144. Mill states that these essays were written in 1829 and 1830. The essay that has been used in our discussion—"On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation proper to it"—was published previously in *Westminster Review,* 26 (1836), 1-29.

4. *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (New York, 1926), p. 107.

5. *The Character and Logical Method of Political Economy* (London, 1888), pp. 25-33. First edition 1857.

6. *Principles of Economics,* p. 780.

7. *Work and Wealth* (London, 1933), p. 2. The first edition appeared in 1914; this is Hobson's masterpiece.

8. *The Works of Walter Bagehot* (Hartford, 1891), Vol. 5, p. 257. Most of Bagehot's economic works appeared in the *Economist,* of which he was editor from 1860 to 1877, and in the *Fortnightly Review.*

9. Keynes, *Scope and Method,* p. 15.

10. Charles Gide and Charles Rist, *A History of Economic Doctrines* (New York, translated from the 1913 edition), pp. 354-355.

11. Arthur Birnie, *An Economic History of the British Isles* (New York, 1937), p. 266.

12. "Senior's Social Economy," *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 43 (1928-1929), 373-374.

13. *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London, 1927), pp. 17-27. See also Lionel Robbins, *The Theory of Economic Policy* (London, 1952), pp. 37-46.

14. "The End of Laissez-Faire," *Economic Journal,* 36 (1926), 435.

15. Some of the best writers on social science theory point out the impossibility of a science of wealth on the ground that the material studied is not sufficiently scientific, or "natural." For instance, F. W. Bain says: "A science can only exist—there can only be 'Science' of those things which either *cannot* be otherwise than they are, or which we *would* not have otherwise. But it is not so in human affairs. A true Science of Economics . . . could only be justified, if all men were perfect, wise, and honest, all equally able to judge and fit to be trusted, all ripe for *absolute liberty:* for

Science merely *looks on,* and must admit that everything that comes within its sphere is equally good." *Occam's Razor* (Oxford, 1890), pp. 50-51.

16. *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England* (New York, 1884), p. 14. Arnold Toynbee (1853-1883) was one of the Hinksey diggers, the Oxford students to whom Ruskin taught social purpose by requiring manual labor. He became a brilliant economic historian at whose early death Jowett, T. H. Green, and other friends established the London settlement Toynbee Hall as a memorial.

17. *Essays in Political Economy* (London, 1888), pp. 38-39. Thomas Edward Cliffe-Leslie (1827-1882) was the founder of the historical school of economics in England.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

1. *History of Economic Doctrines,* pp. 511-513.

2. Frank Daniel Curtin, "Ruskin's Aesthetics in Subsequent Social Reform," *Nineteenth-Century Studies,* ed. Davis, Bald, Devane (Ithaca, 1940), has pointed out the general similarity of the economics of Ruskin and Hobson, but he seems to accept Hobson's analysis of Ruskin at face value. Here I shall examine that analysis critically. It will be more meaningful, therefore, to allow the material of the present chapter to remain in virtually the form in which it was written before the publication of Mr. Curtin's study.

3. *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* p. 120.

4. Charles A. Beard, "Ruskin and the Babble of Tongues," *New Republic,* 87 (1936), 370-371.

5. *The Physiology of Industry* (London, 1889), written in collaboration with A. F. Mummery.

6. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York, 1936), pp. 364-365.

7. *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (London, 1938), pp. 31, 34.

8. This is one of Ruskin's many colorful coinizations. Several other social economists use it.

9. *The Structure of Social Action* (New York, 1937), pp. 100-101.

10. This word reads "raise" in the Cook and Wedderburn edition.

11. Ruskin's word "cost" could, in fact, be substituted for the word "disutility" in the following passage from Fraser: "Just as different units of consumption yield varying degrees of utility, so different units of productive activity yield varying degrees of disutility. Some kinds of employment are inherently less pleasant than others, and involve more disutility per unit of work done . . . ."

This reads like a page out of Ruskin or Hobson, but Fraser adds the following significant note: "The relationship between productive activity and disutility is a topic on which a good deal might be said. Here, however, it is enough to draw attention to a problem which is worthy of study, although lying outside the range of value theory." *Economic Thought and Language,* p. 99.

12. *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* pp. 104-105.

Footnotes to Chapter V

1. *Unto This Last,* ed. R. T. Ely, p. xxii.

2. *The Character and Logical Method of Political Economy,* p. 39.

3. *Philosophy and Political Economy* (New York, 1893), p. 64.

4. *The Theory and Practice of Banking* (London, 1902), I, 2.

5. Ruskin is of course quoting from J. S. Mill's *Principles.* The asterisk is Ruskin's, to mark the following note: "Which? for where investigation is necessary, teaching is impossible." Ruskin could never resist a contentious quibble, and it cost him dearly in his more serious writing.

6. *The Elements of Economics* (London, 1858), I, 83-84.

7. *A System of Logic* (London, 1919), Bk. VI, Ch. 9, pp. 586-587.

8. *Essays in Political Economy,* pp. 50-51.

9. Alfred Stonier and Douglas Hague, *A Textbook of Economic Theory* (London, 1953), p. 343.

10. *A System of Logic,* Bk. VI, Chapters 8-9, pp. 583-586.

11. "Auguste Comte and Positivism," *North British Review,* 21 (May, 1854), 140.

12. *Modern Humanists* (London, 1891), p. 202.

13. *Principles of Social Science* (London, 1858), I, 192-193. Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879) is known chiefly for his attempt to refute Ricardo's rent theory. His works were well known in England and France from the time of the publication of his *Principles of Political Economy* in 1837. He and Ruskin shared at least one opinion. Cliffe-Leslie says of him: "He is a man of plain speech, and swears like a bargeman whenever Mill's name is mentioned." *Essays in Political Economy,* p. 144.

14. *Industrial Revolution,* p. 7.

15. *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization, and Other Essays* (New York, 1919), pp. 73-74.

16. *Beyond Supply and Demand* (New York, 1946), pp. 15-22.

17. *What Veblen Taught, Selected Writings of Thorstein Veblen,* ed. Wesley C. Mitchell (New York, 1936), pp. 110, 425 ff.

18. *Conversations on Political Economy,* by the author of *Con-*

versations on Chemistry and Natural Philosophy, Corrected and improved and adapted to the use of Schools by Rev. J. L. Blake, A.M. (Boston, 1828), p. 23. The original work appeared in 1816.

19. *Illustrations of Political Economy* (London, 1859), I, xi. First published 1832-1834. Miss Martineau in later life repented of her unqualified adulation of the economists and became a translator and follower of Comte.

20. *Principles of Political Economy,* ed. Ashley (London, 1926), p. 247.

21. *The Structure of Social Action,* p. 18.

22. *The Acquisitive Society* (New York, 1920), p. 96. This book exemplifies the similarity of problems and criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a modern synthesis of ideas developed in *Unto This Last* and Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy.*

23. *Economics and Ethics* (New York, 1923), p. 8.

24. *The Distribution of Income* (London, 1899), pp. 26-27.

25. In considering Ruskin's analysis here, it must be remembered that whenever economics has been contemplated from the national standpoint, money has always been treated as a negative, or deductible, quantity. Adam Smith says, "It would be too ridiculous to go about seriously to prove that wealth does not mean money . . . but what money purchases . . ." (Vol. II, Bk. IV, Ch. I, p. 10). He means, of course, it is a foregone conclusion that money is not wealth. In computing the national revenue, Smith says again, ". . . we must always, from their whole annual circulation of money and goods, deduct the whole annual circulation of money, of which not a single farthing can ever make any part" (Vol. I, Bk. II, Ch. II, p. 287).

26. *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* p. 139.

27. C. E. Collett, "Development of Ruskin's Views on Interest," *Economic Journal,* Supplement, January, 1926.

28. *Wealth, Virtual Wealth and Debt* (New York, 1933), pp. 72-73.

29. "Mr. Ruskin on the Gold Question," *MacMillan's Magazine,* 9 (1863), 67.

30. See his *Essays on Political Economy* (London, 1873), especially "Essay Towards a Solution of the Gold Question," pp. 109-165, which appeared originally in *Edinburgh Review,* July, 1860.

31. *The Tragedy of Waste* (New York, 1925), pp. 385, 31.

32. Some of these points are treated by Hobson (*John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* pp. 151-153). It is necessary to review them in order to make what seems to be a correction further on in the argument.

33. *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1926), pp. 586-589.

34. *Principles of Political Economy,* pp. 44-49.
35. *John Ruskin, Social Reformer,* p. 156.
36. *Free Thought in the Social Sciences* (New York, 1926), p. 84.
37. *Studies in Economics,* pp. 265-276.
38. *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1934), pp. 378-411.
39. *Ruskin, the Great Victorian* (London, 1949), p. 76.

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